The Agent Intellect in Aquinas: A Metaphysical Condition of Possibility of Human Understanding as Receptive of Objective Content

by

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Abstract

The following is an interpretation of Aquinas' agent intellect focusing on *Summa Theologiae* I, qq. 75-89, and proposing that the agent intellect is a metaphysical rather than a formal a priori of human understanding. A formal a priori is responsible for the intelligibility *as content* of the object of human understanding and is related to Kant's epistemological views; whereas a metaphysical a priori is responsible for intelligibility *as mode of being* of this same object. We can find in Aquinas' text many indications that the agent intellect is not productive of the universal as content but is, rather, productive of the abstracted or intelligible mode of being of the universal nature. This is because for Aquinas the universal nature, which is the object of human understanding, is *present* in the things themselves but with a different mode of being.

Chapter 1 is intended to establish the fact which requires for Aquinas an agent intellect, and provides two very important principles: one is that the object of human understanding (the universal nature) is present in the things themselves and, the other, that it is not in the

things themselves with a mode of being which makes it available to the intellectual eye. These two principles lead us to the main point of *Chapter 2*, namely the distinction between the intelligible object and its intelligible mode of being. Now, because knowing is receptive of the intelligible object (*Chapter 3*), which is present in the things themselves (*Chapter 1*), the agent intellect is productive not of the object's intelligible content, but of its abstracted or intelligible mode of being (*Chapter 4*).

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Abbreviated References[1]

BT: Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*.

CG*:* Aquinas. *Liber de veritate catholicae Fidei contra errores infidelium seu Summa contra Gentiles.*

De Spir. Creat*.*: Aquinas. *Quaestio disputata de spiritualibus creaturis.*

De Ver*.*: Aquinas. *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*.

EIA: Sellés, Juan Fernando. *El intelecto agente y los filósofos: Venturas y desventuras del supremo hallazgo aristotélico sobre el hombre*.

In Boet. De Trin*.:* Aquinas. *Super Boetium De Trinitate*.

In De Anima*:* Aquinas. *Sentencia libri De anima.*

In Met*.:* Aquinas. *In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis expositio*.

KRV: Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*.

LS: Fabro, Cornelio. *La Svolta Antropologica di Karl Rahner*.

NMP: Fabro, Cornelio. *La Nozione Metafisica di Partecipazione secondo San Tommaso d'Aquino*.

PP: Fabro, Cornelio. *Percezione e Pensiero*.

Q.D. De Anima*:* Aquinas. *Quaestiones disputatae de anima.*

RC: Gilson, Etienne. *Réalisme thomiste et critique de la connaissance*.

RM: Gilson, Etienne. *Le réalisme méthodique*.

Summa*:* Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae.*

TTDV: Knasas, John F.X. "Transcendental Thomism and De Veritate I, 9."

WLTL: Knasas, John F.X. "Why for Lonergan Knowing Cannot Consist in 'Taking a Look'."

[1] In alphabetical order. Cf. Bibliography for editions.

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Opening Note

The agent intellect is a seal of the Divinity in us.
It is proof of a beatifying truth,
the truth that although we ourselves understand, understanding is a gift
and even if the origin of the gift is in the Other,
this Other does not diminish us by the gift, but raises us up to Himself.
The light of understanding is a participation of the Uncreated Light,
and human beings are living images of this Light by an act of God's love.
God is love, human being is loved.
God is Creator, human being is gifted.
God is rich, human being is poor no longer
because God has looked with favour on the nothingness of His servant.
How rich is human being?
To what extent do we resemble God?
What independence, what subjectivity bestowed on us this Subsistent Freedom?

The answer to these questions is of the greatest relevance.
Only by knowing ourselves can we achieve the meaning of our existence.
But we move between independence and limitation,
between an unlimited horizon and a no less unlimited thirst.
Where does our perfection come from?
Where is God?
Is God to be found in the intimate recesses of the soul, or above the Heavens?
Both! But, the radical question is different: is God my water, or my thirst?
But if God is my water, what is the way to the wellspring of salvation?
If God is my thirst, what is the meaning of all of this?
It is not easy to see the way
but the modern human being should not despair.
Is not the agent intellect "like the light"[2]
a gift which helps us to see the way?

As in the original chaos,
the darkness is dispelled by God's command:
"Let there be light!"

[2] Aristotle, *De Anima* III, c. V, 430a 15.

Introduction

The doctrine of the agent intellect in Aquinas is related to the problem of the universals.[3] From a gnoseological point of view, the answer to this problem can take two forms. One is historically represented by Plato and Kant, the other by St. Thomas Aquinas.

The problem of the universals is that human understanding is universal and necessary, yet reality—because it is particular and contingent—does not seem to match the object of our understanding. What is the value of the universal concept, then? Does the universal concept correspond to anything in reality? Or, is it a subjective event—a subjective modification—related somehow to what is particular?

A superficial approach may give the impression that, actually, Kant and Plato are the mutually opposing alternatives. For Plato, in fact, the universal corresponds to something in reality, which is the idea in-itself whereas, for Kant, the universal is a subjective event

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[3] ***Quotations*** will be referenced in brief form, those forms provided in the index called "Abbreviated References." For Aquinas' works: Aquinas' name is always omitted, an abbreviated form of the title begins the quotation and a simple indication of the place follows, in letters and numbers of evident meaning. An exception to this are the quotations from the *Summa Theologiae* I, qq. 75-89, the main source of this dissertation: they always begin directly with the number of question. Another exception is the *Commentary* to Aristotle's *De Anima*: I have used the Leonine edition, therefore, I quote the book, the chapter and the lines by number. The works of other authors are quoted in this way: last name, one word *or* a few letters indicating the title of the work (only when more than one work of the same author is quoted in this dissertation) and the page number. Other more particular indications will be given as needed.

Emphasis in Latin texts is always mine, unless otherwise indicated.

Translations: Aquinas' text is translated using the translation by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, available at http://dhspriory.org/thomas/summa/index.html, unless otherwise indicated. My editing of this translation is made evident with square brackets. When the translation is mine, this is indicated immediately after the translated text. The Latin text of Aquinas is always provided in the footnotes. Authors other than Aquinas are offered in English (my translations, unless an English edition is quoted in Bibliography).

See ***Appendix*** (p. 309) for 24 important notes allowing more precise and/or expanded reference on particular points; this Appendix contains some Latin texts, their translations and certain valuable excursus.

which—precisely because of its characteristic as universal—cannot correspond *formally* to the particular reality of experience.

In both cases, however, the universal does not correspond to the particular. And in both cases, I submit, it is for the same reason: because the universal is taken as an event of consciousness, as an idea which, exactly because of its abstracted condition, can have nothing to do with the raw material of experience. For both, Plato and Kant, universality is a subjective characteristic of ideas or thoughts, a characteristic not found in the particular reality. Now, for Plato, because our thoughts must correspond to reality, the solution was to duplicate our ideas in a world of ideas. For Kant, instead, because our ideas relate to the particular reality, and granted that their universality cannot come from experience, the solution is to make universality the result of a subjective function. Universality and necessity are, for Kant, the result of the subject's activity on the raw material of experience. Whereas, for Plato, the universal is the result of a participation from the idea, for Kant the universal is the result of a subjective activity on the material of experience. In both Plato and Kant, the fact needing explanation is the idea as it is in the mind.

Is this what Aquinas thought? In this thesis, it will be suggested that, for Aquinas, because there is a distinction between the universal as content and as the abstracted mode of being of that content, there is one sense in which intelligibility is the result of a subjective function, and another sense in which intelligibility and universality belong to the things themselves.

When we say that the agent intellect is a metaphysical a priori, we mean that the agent intellect produces intelligibility as the abstracted mode of being of the universal

content; we distinguish this metaphysical a priori from the Kantian formal a priori, which is source of intelligibility as content of an otherwise raw material of experience. That is, a formal a priori is the subjective function by which intelligibility is "produced" in the sensible material. In other words, a formal a priori is the source of intelligible content, whereas a metaphysical a priori is the source of the abstracted mode of being of the content. On the one hand, a doctrine of the agent intellect as a metaphysical a priori presupposes that the intelligible content belongs to the things themselves; a formal a priori, on the other hand, presupposes that the intelligible content is the result of the activity of the subject on an otherwise non-intelligible material of experience.

The reason for bringing Kant and Plato together is to better understand the radical difference between Aquinas and Kant. In other words, what St. Thomas says of Plato, in this respect, applies to Kant. And the reason for showing the difference between St. Thomas and Kant is to make our interpretation of St. Thomas more meaningful for today's reflection. In my view, if St. Thomas is confused with Kant, the contribution of St. Thomas is lost. Such confusion is made possible by the fact that both the Thomistic agent intellect and the Kantian formal a priori can be said to provide intelligibility, or to make intelligible the object of experience. What is suggested in this dissertation is that "intelligible" is used in each case in a different sense. In order to avoid this confusion, two essentially related elements are suggested: first, the Thomistic distinction between *res intellecta* and *modus rei intellectae*, and secondly the Thomistic doctrine of the presence of the universal in the things themselves. As we will see, these two elements—as well as other related elements—are not always clear in modern Thomism.

What is proposed in this thesis is the interpretation of Aquinas' agent intellect as a "metaphysical" a priori, insofar as it produces not the intelligible *content*, but the intelligible *mode of being* of the content. This claim implies many assumptions which will need to be discussed in their proper places, in the body of this dissertation.

My goal in this introduction is, firstly, to outline the main concepts, method and procedure in what will follow; secondly, to refer briefly to the medieval controversy with Averroes regarding the agent intellect; thirdly, to examine the work of some renowned scholars in order to frame the thesis position in a more understandable fashion; fourthly, to briefly introduce Cornelio Fabro (in whom we first found this idea of the agent intellect as a metaphysical rather than a formal a priori),[4] in order to show how and to what extent his work is the source of inspiration for this thesis; fifthly and finally, to report some pertinent findings from other authors.

1) Main Concepts, Method and Procedure

Because of the importance and systematic character of the *Summa Theologiae*,[5] this work will be the focus. Other Thomistic works will be brought into play in order to confirm the interpretation proposed, to show Aquinas' consistency on this topic throughout his career, and/or to qualify the findings in some way.[6] The concern is not to indicate all of the

[4] Cf. Cornelio Fabro, *La Svolta Antropologica di Karl Rahner*, Opere Complete, volume 25 (Segni: EDIVI, 2011), 52 and 116.

[5] Cf. Iª *Pars*, qq. 75-89.

[6] Cf. Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 1: "Although Aquinas is remarkably consistent in his several discussions of the same topic, it is often helpful to examine parallel passages in his writings when fully assessing his views on any issue"; Juan Fernando Sellés, *El intelecto agente y los filósofos: Venturas y desventuras del supremo hallazgo aristotélico sobre el hombre,* [vol.] *I, Siglos IV a.C. - XV*, (Pamplona: EUNSA, 2012), 268: "Thomas Aquinas explains the

parallel texts for each reference of the *Summa*. Particularly important will be the reference to Aquinas' Commentary to the Aristotelian *De Anima*,[7] because of Aquinas' constant reference to Aristotle in dealing with the agent intellect.[8]

The interpretation being offered is that the agent intellect is a metaphysical a priori of human understanding as receptive of objective content. An a priori is a condition of possibility. A condition of possibility gives intelligibility to a fact. That is why the starting point (*Chapter 1*) will be to identify *the fact* that requires an agent intellect as its condition

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existence of the agent intellect in this work, the most mature [i.e., the *Summa Theologiae*], with the same argument as in his first writings" and 270: "[Aquinas] maintains until the end of his production that the proper function of the agent intellect is to abstract."

[7] Sellés (cf. *EIA*, 23) says that the third book of the *De Anima* is the book most commented upon in the history of Philosophy, and that the passage that regards the agent intellect is the most discussed. Sellés' research in *El Intelecto Agente y los Filósofos* has the merit of including 52 pages of essential bibliography, although the author's interpretation of the agent intellect in Aristotle is grounded in questionable principles. Still, even if he disagrees with almost all interpretations of Aristotle in history, including Aquinas', his presentation of the various authors is fair and well documented.

[8] Schmidt (cf. Ciro E. Schmidt Andrade, "Santo Tomás y el De Anima: Comentario a los Caps. 4 y 5 del Libro III del De Anima de Aristóteles," *Analogía Filosófica: Revista De Filosofía* 8, no. 1 [1994]: 124) very insightfully proposes that St. Thomas goes beyond Aristotle but does not contradict him (same remark in Cornelio Fabro, *La Nozione Metafisica di Partecipazione secondo San Tommaso d'Aquino*, Opere Complete, volume 3 [Segni: EDIVI, 2005], 276). It is a most fitting comment because it gives an account of Aquinas' evident intelligence of Aristotle but, at the same time, acknowledges that not everything that St. Thomas says is explicit in Aristotle. For the Angelic, I submit, the fact that something is not written in the book does not mean that Aristotle did not have it in his mind. Still, to make his case, St. Thomas always tries to find *textual* support for his claims, or he refers his interpretation to explicit principles that Aristotle maintains in other places, or he stresses the internal coherence of the text. It is not difficult to agree with Stump in this regard: "In a recent volume of essays on Aristotle's *De anima*, Martha Nussbaum describes Aquinas's work as 'one of the very greatest commentaries on the work' and 'very insightful.' T.H. Irwin, a leading interpreter of Aristotle, acknowledges that at one point in the *Sententia libri Ethicorum* (Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics), Aquinas 'actually explains Aristotle's intention more clearly than Aristotle explains it himself'. Such judgments apply pretty generally to Aquinas's Aristotelian commentaries, all of which are marked by his extraordinary ability as a philosophical commentator to discern a logical structure in almost every passage he examines in every sort of text: not only Aristotle's but also those of others, from Boethius to St Paul." (Stump, 8-9, cf. notes 8 and 9).

of possibility.[9] Identifying this fact will help to show that the doctrine of the agent intellect is related to the problem of the universals, and thus relates to the critical problem.[10] The fact, for Aquinas (*section 1*), is that we know the natures of bodies, but those natures are not in the bodies with an intelligible mode of being; it is this fact which results in the requirement of an agent intellect. The implication is that, for St. Thomas, the object of intelligence in its formal aspect (*section 2*) is the universal, the nature of the corporeal thing in its absoluteness, not the material of sensibility. Another important implication (*section 3*) is that the object of intelligence, the universal, subsists in the corporeal thing and belongs to it. It is hoped that all of this will allow us to conclude *Chapter 1* (*section 4*) with a better understanding of the role of the agent intellect and its necessity in relationship to the problem of the universals; that is, the role of the agent intellect is to make intelligible in act the universal *in re*, i.e. the nature of the corporeal things, so that they *may be seen* by the possible intellect.

The first chapter will open the door to many considerations which will take their proper places in the following chapters. In *Chapter 2* the essential difference between St. Thomas and Kant in their respective approaches to the problem of the universals is studied;

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[9] Cf. Tsenay Serequeberhan, "Aquinas and Kant: a Comparative Study," *Dialogue: Journal of Phi Sigma Tau* 26 (1984): 43, "The question of the agent intellect is raised and answered in order to satisfy the function by which actual understanding is acquired […] Aquinas moves from what the intellect does to what it needs in order to accomplish what it actually does."

[10] By problem of the universals I understand the answer to the question "What is it that we predicate of the many? Is it a name, a concept or a nature?" By critical problem I understand the answer to the question, "What is the value of the universal knowledge of reality? Is it entirely given a posteriori or is it rather an a priori addition to the data of experience?" The second problem points explicitly to the origin of the content of consciousness, the first one points rather to the universal's proper metaphysical "place." The Thomistic consideration of the universal as nature (and so *universale in re*) leads, in my view, to answer the critical problem in the direction of an a posteriorism of the universal content of consciousness.

namely, St. Thomas makes a distinction (which Kant does not) between the mode of being of the (intellectual) object and the object itself, between the *res intellecta* and the *modus rei intellectae*. In fact, claiming that the agent intellect is a metaphysical a priori is to claim that the agent intellect produces not the *res intellecta*, but the mode of being of the same. In other words, to "produce the intelligible" (referred to the agent intellect) does not mean to produce the content of intellectual knowing, but to produce the mode of being of that content. The content is not produced. The content is already in the things themselves, although with a different mode of being (which is the point of *Chapter 1*). The content is received and this is the point of *Chapter 3*. *Chapter 2* is key to the interpretation of Aquinas' text for the following reason. In order to understand what it means "to make the intelligible", a distinction must be drawn between two ways in which the terms "intelligible" and "universal" are used in the *Summa*. That is, one way is as referred to the object, and the other way is as referred to its mode of being in the mind.

As anticipated, *Chapter 3* treats a very important issue which underlies the whole doctrine of the agent intellect in Aquinas: intellectual knowing is originally receptive, intentional as possession of the other, defined by alterity.[11] The intelligible content is received. Therefore, the role of the agent intellect in human understanding, active by definition, is not productive of content. For Aquinas, if anything comes from the subject, it is not the content because the content perfects the subject and is, originally, other than the subject. In this *Chapter,* our designation of human understanding as "receptive of objective content" will become more clear. Human understanding implies an intentional *reception* of

[11] Also, the role of identity in human knowing will be explored in this *Chapter*.

the perfection of other (the content), which is common to both sense and intelligence in their first actuations (where to understand is a certain "seeing"). Because, for St. Thomas, the content is real (and in that sense "objective", as belonging to the real object), the "mediation" of abstraction does not imply losing any contact with reality.[12]

If, for Aquinas, intellectual knowing refers initially to a universal object, and if that universal is imbedded in the particular, and if knowing is receiving that universal, the agent intellect cannot be a formal a priori, responsible for the intelligible content. This is the precise question of *Chapter 4*, which will have two main sections. The first section will include discussion of the texts seeming to suggest that Aquinas admits a formal a priori in intellectual knowing, or that the agent intellect is this formal a priori. In the second section, evidence will be offered to try to show that, for Aquinas, the agent intellect is not a formal a priori, but a metaphysical a priori, productive not of the content but of the intelligible mode of being of the universal nature subsisting in reality.

2) The Controversy with Latin Averroism

The doctrine of the agent intellect is found many times in the context of the controversy with Latin Averroism[13] which, according to Sellés, had grown in relevance

[12] Cf. *In Boet. De Trin*. 6, 3, c.: "Thus, the intellect is able to conceive without mediation the quiddity of the sensible thing, but not the quiddity of an intelligible thing." (my trans.) [Et sic immediate potest concipere intellectus quiditatem rei sensibilis, non autem alicuius rei intelligibilis.]; *De Ver* 2, 3, ad 3: "… for to be directed to the likeness of a thing is the same as to be directed to the thing which is known through this likeness." [… idem est ei ferri in similitudinem rei, et in rem quae per talem similitudinem cognoscitur.]; *Summa Theologiae* I, 12, 9, c. (Stump's translation, cf. Stump, 256 note 50): "… to cognize things by means of their similitudes existing in the cognizer is to cognize those things as they are in themselves, or in their own natures…" [… cognoscere res per earum similitudines in cognoscente existentes, est cognoscere eas in seipsis, seu in propriis naturis…]"

[13] In the *Summa*, cf. 79, 4-5 and 88, 1.

during St. Thomas's career.[14] According to Sellés, what St. Thomas criticized in Averroes was his claim that both the possible and the agent intellect are respectively one for all human beings, in that way denying the immortality of the soul.[15] St. Thomas tries to show how inconclusive are the arguments taken from Aristotle's *De Anima* to support the Averroistic claim that the agent intellect does not belong to the soul.[16]

Sellés considers Aquinas' interpretation of Averroes to be basically correct, despite the fact of its being said that Averroes would have maintained the immortality of the soul, among other religious principles.[17] He suggests that the reason for the Arabic tendency to consider the intellect as one is a certain search for Aristotle's compatibility with Islam, which could also have accounted for the Neoplatonic reading of the Philosopher.[18] In Stump's view, St. Thomas would also admit that human knowing must derive in some sense from the Divine intellect; this, however, does not lead him to agree with Averroes, but to postulate that the agent intellect exists in each human being as a light participated from God.[19]

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[14] Cf. Sellés, *EIA*, 200. He notices that St. Albert the Great's *De unitate intellectus* (1256) is addressed "against Averroes" whereas the same-titled work of St. Thomas (1270) is addressed "against Averroists." He quotes also *Summa* I-II, 77, a.3, where the followers of Averroes are said to be "many."

[15] Cf. Juan Fernando Sellés, "La Crítica Tomista a la Interpretación Árabe y Judía del Intelecto Agente," *Espíritu: Cuadernos Del Instituto Filosófico De Balmesiana* 52, no. 128 (2003): 219; Stump, 266.

[16] Cf. Hernán Martínez Millán, "Sun and Light, or on the Agent Intellect," *Revista Española De Filosofía Medieval* 20 (2013): 50.

[17] Cf. Sellés, *EIA*, 211.

[18] Cf. Sellés, *EIA*, 181-186.

[19] Cf. Stump, 266: "… [I]n rejecting the Averroistic line that there must be only one agent intellect for all human beings, [Aquinas] says it must nonetheless be the case that all our intellects derive from the one separate intellect that is God, because all human beings share a common set of first principles."

Stump says that "[Aquinas'] natural preoccupation during this period with the writing of *Summa Theologiae Iª* may also help to account for the fact that his other work of that time[20] shows a special interest in the nature and operations of the human soul, the subject matter of Questions 75–89 of Iª."[21] It could certainly be suggested that the controversy with Latin Averroism would also have been a strong reason for Aquinas' focus on these topics, particularly if we keep in mind that, according to Stump, *In De Anima* is his first Aristotelian Commentary. He probably realized that the best way to face the challenge of Averroes' followers was to offer a better alternative regarding Aristotelian interpretation.

The controversy with Averroes certainly works as the historical framework for some of the texts we will discuss. The focus of this dissertation, however, will be the role of the agent intellect regarding the problem of the universals, which was not the controversial question then. According to Cory, for example, there is a "growing scholarly appreciation of the shared philosophical tradition linking medieval Arabic and Latin philosophers, showing that Aquinas's critique of Averroes's separate Intellects does not preclude his appropriating the conceptual framework of Averroes's abstraction theory."[22] The role of the agent intellect in the abstraction of the universal nature is precisely that which is relevant for the present purposes: in this way, the necessity and the nature of an agent intellect in Aquinas can be seen from a more systematic point of view.

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[20] According to her dating of St. Thomas' works, *Q.D. De Anima* (1265-1266), *In De Anima* (1267-1268) and *Q.D. De Spirit. Creat.* (1267-1268) belong to this period (Summa Iª pars, 1266-1268). Cf. Stump, xvi-xx.

[21] Stump, 10.

[22] Therese S. Cory, "Averroes and Aquinas on the Agent Intellect's Causation of Intelligibles," *Recherches de Theologie et Philosophie Medievales* 82 (2015): 4.

3) Some Renowned Scholars

To clarify and thus to understand this particular systematic view of the agent intellect's role, some important scholars in their diverse accounts of knowing will now be studied. This study will be limited to those pertinent issues or points in other scholarly works considered helpful, either by similarity or by contrast, in understanding the view being proposed here.

Étienne Gilson

The work of Étienne Gilson (1884-1978)[23] is very much in the same direction being proposed here, but he articulates his position with elements that are in tension with the proposed interpretation of St. Thomas. The positive elements will be acknowledged and then the tensions will be examined.

For Gilson, the source of universal content is not a priori but a posteriori. This is the main difference between Aquinas and Kant.[24] For Kant, the act of the subject is required, as condition of possibility, for the object of intellectual knowledge to be itself. Universality and necessity in the object can have only an a priori source, and the faculties of knowledge are considered as a power of unification of the matter of experience.[25]

Also in *Le Réalisme Méthodique*, the intellectual content comes from the things themselves and not from the subject.[26] Gilson rejects the principle of immanence: the fact

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[23] Cf. Etienne Gilson, *Le réalisme méthodique* (Paris: Téqui, 1935), abbreviated *RM*; Etienne Gilson, *Réalisme thomiste et critique de la connaissance* (Paris: Vrin, 1939), abbreviated *RC.*

[24] Cf. *RC* 151. In this section, references to Gilson's works will not include his name.

[25] Cf. *RC* 139-141.

[26] Cf. *RM* 82, 101, 106-107.

that an intellectual content is given in our knowledge does not mean that knowledge is the cause of this content, and the fact that every object is given within our thought does not imply that it is reduced to our thought.[27] He affirms the original alterity of the object of human understanding[28] and rejects a notion of epistemology as the study of thinking (where thinking is consciousness of a certain knowledge) in favor of a study of knowledge itself (as apprehension of an object distinct from the act of knowing).[29]

More particularly, regarding our topic, Gilson says that Kant is obliged to locate the source of the intelligibility of experience in human knowing itself, because Kant had rejected the possibility of an intelligible *datum*, of something exterior that could fecundate rational knowledge.[30] In a rather hidden reference to the agent intellect (rarely mentioned in the two essays examined), Gilson admits that the light of the intellect plays a role in forming the intellectual principles, but not that their content comes from it. The content of the first principles has its source in the sensible data, and Gilson is clearly rejecting the interpretation of Aquinas that would make of the first principles something like a priori laws to be applied to sensibility.[31]

Gilson denies the agent intellect the character of an a priori condition of human knowing and, thus, may seem to oppose the currently proposed view of the agent intellect as a metaphysical a priori. What he actually opposes, however, is the agent intellect as a

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[27] Cf. *RM* 97.
[28] Cf. *RM* 66.
[29] Cf. *RM* 101- 103.
[30] Cf. *RC* 168, 173.
[31] Cf. *RC* 200-202.

Kantian and *formal* a priori; he affirms, instead, that the faculties of knowing, in a truly Thomistic and Aristotelian prospective, are psychological faculties and therefore beings.[32]

Now, in what sense does Gilson admit that the source of intellectual content is in experience rather than in the subject itself? For Gilson, the universal is caused by experience, but it is not "in" experience, because it is not real. That is to say, Gilson believes that there is something in the individual object of experience (its nature) that is the source of the intelligible content, not though insofar as it is intuited in some way, but insofar as it is the cause of the sensible manifestations, which are in turn the cause of our concept. The intelligible content (for Gilson, the *quidditas*) is related to the nature that is in reality, not though as that same nature in a different mode of being, but as an intelligible effect of that nature in intelligence.[33] This is why Gilson can reject the Kantian approach, saying that the source of the universal is a posteriori, and at the same time can deny the universal *as content* any existence in reality. The difference between Gilson's interpretation and the current one proposed here is precisely the fact that he denies an identity between the content of our concept and the nature of the thing itself; this denial results, it seems, from his overlooking St. Thomas' insistence that the different mode of being of the same object does not change the object itself.[34]

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[32] Cf. *RC* 137-138.

[33] Cf. *RC* 218-223.

[34] I do not claim that this intentional identity is perfect (it is limited by the precision of the phantasm in each subject and by the possibilities of human experience), but I do claim that *what* is known is precisely *what* the thing is. One does not need to know something perfectly to say that one knows *it*.

In this sense Gilson affirms that the intellect conceives what it does not perceive, because "man" and "existence" are merely concepts of the intellect, and not something real and concrete.[35] Still, he acknowledges with St. Thomas that the intelligible is in the things themselves, and that we think it in the phantasm because it *is* there.[36] But in what sense, if they are just concepts, and only the singular exists?[37] What is there is not *what* we conceive (*quidditas*) but *that from which* we conceive, the essence, and that is why we may say that we know the *quidditas* of the sensible natures, and not the nature itself.[38] Classic realism, he says, rests on the fact that our knowledge truly attains the real, *because it is caused in us by the real itself,* and not by an alleged intuition of the intelligible.[39] The reason, for Gilson, that the essences of the sensible things cannot be intuited is that their forms are "purely intelligible." This statement is truly surprising given that, for St. Thomas, the reason they cannot be seen in their natural mode of being is precisely the opposite. The reason, according to St. Thomas, is that they are not intelligible in act, which is precisely why St. Thomas introduces, with Aristotle, the agent intellect.

The very valuable insight in Gilson's approach is that the intelligible content comes from the things themselves. The difficulty, however, is his interpretation with regard to the object of intelligence. That is, because Gilson does not differentiate the mode of being the object has in reality from the mode of being the object has in the mind, he denies the

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[35] Cf. *RC* 204.
[36] Cf. *RC* 208.
[37] Cf. *RC* 210, *RM* 73.
[38] Cf. *RC* 218-219.
[39] Cf. *RC* 222-223. He will say that the intellect "sees directly" the concept (cf. *RC* 215), but because he does not take "concept" as the real thing itself.

identity between them, and understands the content of knowing as *an effect* of the natures of things through their sensible effects. In this way, more than an intentional identity, he seems to propose an intentional "proportion" between the content of knowing and the natures of things, the proportion between cause and effect.[40] In the currently proposed interpretation of St. Thomas, instead, the agent object is an intelligible in act (not the sensible phantasm) which represents the thing itself, only in its nature, abstracted from the individual conditions in the matter.

Joseph Owens

Joseph Owens (1908-2005), in his *Cognition: An Epistemological Inquiry*[41] intuits the most important elements of Thomistic Gnoseology, including the two modes of being that explain cognition,[42] the alterity of the object of knowing,[43] the intentional identity between object and subject, the origin of the universal content in sensible things.[44] Still, when it comes to his final synthesis, Owens does not seem to create a convincing system,[45] nor does he appear to recreate the Thomist one.[46]

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[40] In this sense the formal identity or *convenientia in forma* between subject and object which Gilson proposes in *RM* 56-57 may be understood. I will come back to this in *Chapter 3*, when treating the Aristotelian identity.

[41] Cf. Joseph Owens, *Cognition: An Epistemological Inquiry* (Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1992). In this section, I will quote only the page number of this work.

[42] Cf. 38-40; 45 note 22; 351-353; 357-358.

[43] Cf. 3; 33-35; 326-327.

[44] Cf. 70 and note 5; 82 (interpretation does not add any radically new content); 334, cf. also 343 note 28.

[45] For example, I found particularly challenging his conclusions on the problem of the universals, cf. 154-158.

[46] Cf. 140 and note 2, where he implies that the issue of the agent intellect is not a concern in Epistemology. Now, Aquinas' recourse to the agent intellect is crucial to understand his approach to the problem of the universals, which is the most important problem in Epistemology.

The main tension between the view being proposed herein and Owens' view is his lack of *proper* distinction between content and mode of being of the content. He denies the common nature–*in itself*–any reality.[47] The aforementioned lack of distinction leads Owens to affirm that the abstracted object is identical with the whole individual, but without explaining in what sense, then, they are different, or on what grounds there is an identity.[48] In pp. 324-325, Owens initially denies the nature in itself any kind of being, and then says that one and the same object has the two kinds of being. Now, if it is nothing in itself, how can the nature admit even one kind of being? What he means to say is evident; that is, that the nature never exists without one of these two modes of being. However, this means precisely that, in both modes of being, the nature itself is present, one and the same. In other words, *what* is common to both modes of being is present in each of them. *What* is this? It is the content, which is one. But, because Owens' view confuses the numerical unity of the concept with the specific unity of the content, he cannot admit that the nature itself is one. And, therefore, he says: "any existence whatsoever *would tie it* [the nature] *inexorably to either* the particular or the universal and would render impossible the

[47] Cf. 154ff, where he claims that there is nothing common really existing in the individuals, because the nature exists in them individualized only, not as common; 171, "You cannot give a universal, or a nature as common, any real existence" and Owens refers here to p. 163 note 19, where we find the text of *De Ente*, 3.85-87 Leonine ed.: "… human nature is not found in individuals as one…" (my trans.) [… non invenitur in individuis natura humana secundum unitatem…] In that place, however, St. Thomas is clearly referring to the Platonic universal, which is one *numerically* for all of the individuals. The Aristotelian nature is one *specifically* in all of the individuals, and therefore truly common in that sense. The point is that, for St. Thomas, there is a *real* distinction between the essence of a thing and its individuating principles, though not a real *separation*. They are not the same thing (thing = co-principle, as when Aristotle calls matter a certain "substance"), despite the fact that they are together in the same thing (thing = substance in its first meaning, the real particular thing). This is one of the most important elements in my interpretation.

[48] Cf. 141-143.

thoroughgoing identity of predicate with subject that is required for saying the one is the other."[49] This seems precisely the opposite of what St. Thomas says in *In Met.* 1, lect. 10, 158[50] and *Summa* I, 84, 1, c.; that is, St. Thomas holds that it is *not necessary* for the thing understood to *exist in reality* with the same mode of being as it has in the intellect, as Plato thought. For Aquinas, the *same thing* admits two modes of being. In Owens' interpretation, the thing understood cannot be separated from its mode of being, which is the same problem found in Plato.

Another hermeneutic problem apparent in Owens is a certain confusion between intentional and real identity in human knowing, that is, between the identity subject-object ("anima est *quodammodo* omnia"), and the identity intellect-species ("intellectum in actu *est* intellectus in actu", which here will be called the "Aristotelian identity").[51] In *Chapter 3* it will be shown how, for Aquinas, they are different. The intellect in act and the species by which it understands[52] are one as subjective potency and its own subjective act, i.e., they are one and the same real thing. But the intellect and the thing understood are one in a different way, only *quodammodo*, insofar as the perfection of another thing is *present in* the

[49] 350, my emphasis.

[50] The last number in the quotes from the *Commentary to the Aristotelian Metaphysics* is the paragraph number of the edition I used (cf. *Bibliography*).

[51] Although both "identities" can be referred to Aristotle, we prefer to call after the Philosopher the one that is truly an identity (because real), which is also the one that most frequently confuses the interpreters of Aquinas.

[52] Clearly, for St. Thomas, it is not the faculty which operates, but the subject through the faculty. Cf. *De Spirit. Creat.*, a.10 ad 15: "Now it must not be said that the agent intellect understands in isolation from the possible intellect, but that the man understands by means of both…" [Non est autem dicendum quod intellectus agens seorsum intelligat ab intellectu possibili: sed homo intelligit per utrumque…] Still, to simplify the expression, many times the faculty will be referred to as the one "doing" things.

knower. In other words, the species *is* the intellect in act but the object, represented in the species, *is not* the intellect itself. As we will see, this "confusion of identities" is at work in other interpretations of St. Thomas as well.[53] Connected with this lack of differentiation of the identities is that, for Owens, both subject and object are known simultaneously, although the knower indirectly.[54] This confusion jeopardizes the original alterity of the object of knowing.

It is clear that Owens intends to oppose the view of knowing which attributes to the subject all of the responsibility for the intellectual content of human cognition.[55] In that sense, Owens is very much in line with the currently proposed view of the agent intellect as a metaphysical a priori, as cause of an intelligible mode of being, and not of the object itself. Owens states, "The percipient gives existence to the activities of sensible cognition and perception, in which no new object is produced but new cognitional existence is given to an already really existent thing. In intellection the natures of the things are abstracted and given cognitional existence by the knower."[56] Still, if the natures of the things are not seen as truly distinct from their individual conditions in the matter, the origin of the universal

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[53] For Owens, cf.41-43; 142-143; 348. An interesting text from Owens quoted by Stump: "You are the things perceived or known. Knower and thing known […] become one and the same in the actuality of cognition. From the strictly epistemological standpoint, this thoroughgoing identity of knower and thing known is the most important and most fundamental tenet in the Aristotelian conception of knowledge" (Stump, 274, and in note: "Owens 1992, p. 114." The quote is not from his *Cognition*, although from the same year).

[54] Cf. 39; 46; 49: both known, the difference being in focus only, which at first is on the object; 348: there is a question of which one is epistemologically prior.

[55] Cf. 9; 40; 320.

[56] 320.

content is at risk of being seen as dependent on the functions of the subject, or perhaps merely an effect of the object of perception,[57] as in Gilson.

Eleonore Stump

Eleonore Stump (1947-)[58] offers clear insight into some of the most important elements of Thomistic Epistemology, but certain principles, probably coming from her philosophical views, can be seen as interfering with an accurate interpretation of St. Thomas.

Let us begin by examining the positive elements of Stump's interpretation, as follows. Knowing is verified by the reception of a species in the faculty, and there is a distinction between phantasm and intelligible species.[59] The intellect's proper object is the particular thing's *universal* nature[60] and the act of the intellect is a "discovering" (rather than creating or inventing) features of the external world that are independent from the operations of the intellect;[61] in other words, the source of intelligible content is in the things themselves. As she herself says: "Aquinas supposes that the cookie dough of reality comes pre-cut into particular kinds of things; and, unlike Kantians, Aquinas assumes that we all naturally recognize those very kinds of things with the natures they really have."[62]

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[57] Cf. 40-43.

[58] Cf. Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (New York: Routledge, 2003). The relevant essays are: "Foundations of Knowledge" (pp. 217ff) and "The Mechanisms of Cognition" (pp. 244ff). I will quote only the page number.

[59] Cf. 17-18.

[60] Cf. 19.

[61] Cf. 231.

[62] 265-266.

A most insightful element in Stump's work, in terms of Aquinas' Epistemology, is her recognition of the importance of distinguishing the two modes of being of the form of the known; that is, respectively, its mode of being in reality and its mode in the knower. That is why the one who knows the form of a thing does not become in reality that thing itself, but only cognitionally. For her, however, the cognitional reception of a form is still a material reception of the form of the known, according to what might be called her "encoded information theory."[63] In Stump's words:

> The reception is "spiritual" or "immaterial" in the sense that, for example, the way in which the matter of DNA contains the forms of hemoglobin does not turn the matter of the DNA into hemoglobin. Or, as Aquinas would put it, the DNA is assimilated to the protein as regards the form but not as regards the matter. Aquinas's "spiritual" reception of forms is thus like the coding of maps or blueprints. This is, of course, also the way we ourselves think sensation occurs, encoded information being received in virtue of a change in the matter of a corporeal sense organ.[64]

After giving, as an example, the presence of the form of the protein in the DNA, and speaking about sensible knowing, she says:

> What Aquinas refers to as the spiritual reception of an immaterial form, then, is what we are more likely to call encoded information […] Scholars have disputed the point, but I think that the texts are decisively in favor of the conclusion that, for the senses, the spiritual reception of sensible species is a change in the matter of the bodily organ of the sense.[65]

A few lines later, she interprets Aquinas'text as if he himself were suggesting that the intentional reception is a material reception.[66] She claims also that the senses would be

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[63] Cf. 17; 250-253.

[64] 254.

[65] Cf. 253.

[66] She interprets Aquinas' statement: "And so it must be that a sense receives corporeally and materially the similitude of the thing which is sensed." (*In DA II*.12.377, cf. Stump, 253), and a similar text of *QDV II*.5 ad 2 (cf. 254 note 40) as if St. Thomas were saying "materially" in the real

made into intellect, according to Aquinas, were we to accept an immaterial reception of a form in the senses, and adds: "It is therefore clearly possible on his view for the spiritual reception of an immaterial form to consist in the alteration of matter."[67]

These concepts are applied to the intellect also since, for her, it is clear that Aquinas "turns out to have been wrong in his view that the intellect uses no bodily organ."[68] At the conclusion of Chapter 8, she says:

> In the mode in which the form is in the thing cognized, the form makes that thing what it is – a wolf, say. But in the mode in which the form is in the thing cognized [sic],[69] spiritually or intentionally, *as encoded information*, it does not make the cognizer be a wolf. Although when it is in the cognizer, it is the same form as the form in the wolf, the difference of mode makes it the case that the cognizer does not literally turn into a wolf when cognizing one.[70]

Apparently, Stump does not carry all the way to its final consequences the principle of intentionality and of the two modes of being; instead, she reduces the Thomistic intentional mode of being to the material one ("encoded information theory"), and that is why she can wonder whether this Thomistic principle makes any sense in the justification of knowing.[71] Because she views the presence of the form in the knower as a material copy, Stump is not convinced; she knows that *for St. Thomas* the two modes of being are the explanation, and this is her great hermeneutic insight in Aquinas; but because her approach does not seem to fully appreciate the meaning and the consequences of such a distinction,

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sense, and not "with the material conditions", which is a qualification of the content, not of the mode of being of the content in the knower.

[67] Cf. 254.

[68] Cf. 264.

[69] I think it is clear that she means not "thing cognized" but "cognizer."

[70] 275, my emphasis.

[71] Cf. 275-276.

she cannot see how this can be a plausible explanation of knowing. The suggestion[72] can be made that, for Aquinas, two modes of being means precisely two modes of being, such that the two cannot be reduced to one. The theory of two modes of being presupposes the fact of knowing as presence of the object to the subject, as communion of two. The doctrine of Aquinas can make sense only from that "Thomistic fact." Whether or not that fact is granted is another story.[73]

Finally, as regards Aquinas' text, Stump appears not to differentiate between what we call intentional identity (subject – object, *anima est quodammodo omnia*) and Aristotelian identity (species and faculty of knowing, *intellectum in actu est intellectus in actu*). She says: "We are now in a position to understand Aquinas's frequently repeated, frequently cited notion that 'all cognition arises from the assimilation of the cognizer to the thing cognized', that 'the intellect in act is the thing understood in act', so that 'the soul is all things'."[74] Aquinas makes a distinction between these identities, as we will see in *Chapter 3*. It is to be noted, however, that sometimes the issue may be a matter only of

[72] In *Chapter 2*, I will elaborate upon this theory of the two modes of being in Aquinas.

[73] Regarding other Epistemological matters in general, Stump does not believe that the Epistemology of Aquinas can hold itself without recourse to the principle that God created the faculties of knowing and therefore they function properly and are reliable (cf. 21, 234, 276). She also supposes that, for St. Thomas, the first principles are not indubitable (cf. 231); and that his reliabilistic and optimistic theory of knowledge would not be able to overcome skeptical doubts (cf. 237).

[74] 273. Cf. Stump, 17, where Aquinas' view of knowledge is said to involve "… some sort of formal identity between the extramental object (O) and the cognizing faculty (F) in its actually cognizing O. However, Aquinas takes that (Aristotelian) identity claim to mean only that the form of O is somehow in F [in note: 85, 2 ad 1]." I would suggest that St. Thomas in that text is not applying the Aristotelian identity to the intentional, but saying that the former (*real* identity species - intellect) does not jeopardize the latter (which is *a kind of* identity with something other than ourselves).

textual interpretation because some authors, who misread Aquinas' text, do understand that there is a difference between the species and the object known, and that there is a difference between the two ways of "receiving" the form. This seems to be true in the case of Stump.[75] Still, it is important to notice this textual misinterpretation because it may result in ascribing to St. Thomas an identity between subject and object which would be foreign to his mind.

Armand A. Maurer

The work of Armand Maurer (1915-2008)[76] renders a perfect understanding of the problem of intellectual knowledge, that is, how it is possible that universal truths come from experience. He does not believe that the universal essence has any other kind of existence outside the mind and therefore, for Maurer, universality must be a subjective aspect of human knowing, depending on the spirituality of the subject, and grounded in some way in the reality of experience. Also, because the human subject is historical, and reality also is subject to contingency, there is no such thing as created eternal truth. Maurer believes that this doctrine could be substantiated on Thomistic principles, although he realizes the tensions with the actual doctrine of Aquinas. Here begins a more detailed exploration of these issues.

The problem of knowledge is set up in very clear terms by Maurer. Paraphrasing Fackenheim, Maurer writes: "It must be inquired whether, and if so how, the world of

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[75] Cf. 249-250.

[76] All of the quotes are from Armand A. Maurer, *Being and Knowing: Studies in Thomas Aquinas and Later Medieval Philosophers* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990). The relevant essays are "St. Thomas and Eternal Truths" (pp. 43ff) and "St. Thomas and Historicity" (pp. 95ff). We will indicate page number only in this section.

experience, which is historical, can provide a ground for universal and transcendent truth." Maurer's goal is clear in his statement: "My concern in the present lecture is […] how St. Thomas Aquinas accounts for universal and necessary philosophic truths drawn from a changing world by temporally situated humans."[77]

The greatest tension between Maurer's view and the view currently being offered is the lack of distinction in Maurer's view between the universality of the content and universality as a mode of being of the content, a distinction which will be shown crucial for a more accurate interpretation of Aquinas.[78] Due to this lack of distinction, Maurer denies the universal any existence outside the mind. An example of this is found in his section "St. Thomas and Eternal Truths",[79] the first section we will examine:

> Truth, St. Thomas contends, is one of those notions that have a foundation in reality but receive their formal character and completion from an act of the intellect. Time and universals are other examples of this type of notion. They do not exist as such outside the mind, though they have some basis in reality.[80]

Nothing is stable in the changing world. This is why, for Maurer, the eternity of truth implies the real immutability of its subject, which is given only in God. Maurer states: "If we take truth to be the inherent measure of true things (the truth we find in things and in created intellects and their propositions), then truth is not eternal, for neither the things themselves nor the intellects in which truth inheres exist for all eternity."[81] And so, in

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[77] 96-97, note 3.
[78] Cf. *Chapter 2*.
[79] 43-58.
[80] 46.
[81] 48.

human beings, Maurer transforms the historicity of the subjective intelligible being into the historicity of the intelligible content.

A problem arises from Maurer's not differentiating sufficiently between what Aquinas says about eternal truths (a discussion regarding the *subjective being* of judgments or ideas)[82] and the necessity or universality of truth in general, in reference to the *content* of those judgments or ideas. Maurer himself refers the term "eternity" to a "mode of duration of being" which, as such, belongs to God alone.[83] It is in this sense that Aquinas denies the existence of eternal truths outside the divine mind. Does Maurer mean to say the same? Maurer's remarks towards the end of the article indicate that he is going further:

> We have already remarked that [St. Thomas] does not ascribe an essential being to essences taken just in themselves. Though he grants that essences may be considered in themselves, he does not believe they have a being or entity in themselves. The only being they have is that of the subject in which they exist; in themselves they are simply nothing […] There is no room in St. Thomas' thought for created eternal truths, for this would imply that God could give truths eternal being, which is reserved for him alone […] Only on the supposition that eternal truths have a kind of entity in themselves does the late medieval and early modern philosophical discussion concerning their possible creation or non-creation, and their possible independence of the divine mind and will make sense […]. But at the same time does this not eliminate the distinction between necessary and contingent truths? *If essences perish with the existences of things — if they have no essential being of their own distinct from their existential being - so too do necessary propositions, in which essential predicates are attributed to a subject. These propositions, then, are not eternal or necessary but contingent truths*.[84]

Maurer is no longer speaking merely of the subjective being of the truth, but of the necessity of the propositions. Maurer's conclusion is ascribed to St. Thomas, who says

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[82] Cf. 56.
[83] Cf. 56.
[84] 57, my emphasis.

"There is no necessary truth in creatures."[85] Maurer himself, however, had recognized that, in the same place, St. Thomas makes an important distinction. That distinction is between the two ways of regarding a nature or essence, one way being in itself, the other way being either as it exists in reality or as it exists in the mind. Maurer had also granted, with St. Thomas, that the nature in itself could be called eternal.[86] Thus Maurer appears to suggest the following reasoning: the essence in itself does not exist except in one of those two modes of being (in reality or in the mind); now, neither of those two modes of being is eternal; therefore, no essence *is* eternal or necessary, and so no truth about essences can be necessary.

This reasoning, however, raises a question: is this not exactly the error made by Plato, against which St. Thomas lines up with Aristotle?[87] St. Thomas justifies the universality and necessity of human knowing by distinguishing between the way natures exist in reality and in the mind, and not by denying that those very natures exist in the particular, as Plato did. And Aquinas justifies abstraction not by saying that the essences need to *exist* abstracted from the particular determinations, as Plato would, but by saying that, in the first operation, we know the essence *without considering* its particular determinations. For Aquinas, the things that exist together can be known separately, because one is not the other, even if one cannot exist without the other. For Aquinas, two "things" can compose one "thing", as do essence and *esse*, act and potency, matter and form, substance and accidents, etc.. No creature can be said to be without composition,

[85] 57, quoting *In I Sent.*, d. 19, q.5, a. 3.
[86] Cf. 51.
[87] Cf. *Summa* I, 84, 1, c..

even if the elements of some of these compositions cannot exist separately in creatures. This is the foundation of abstraction.

For Aquinas, there is no absolute necessity and stability in human knowing as subjective characteristic, nor as something coming from the subject: in this sense there are no eternal truths. But there is stability and necessity in human knowing on the side of the object, because there is stability in the particular reality we know, by reason of its species or nature.[88] What comes from the subject, namely from the agent intellect, is not this objective stability but an intelligible mode of being, which can be *as necessary*[89] or as contingent as any other created mode of being.

The section "St. Thomas and Historicity",[90] can now be examined. Here, Maurer recognizes that, for St. Thomas, there is such a thing as a permanent nature or essence in things, but Maurer qualifies his own statement: "St. Thomas never doubted that we have a permanent nature or essence that specifies us as human beings, but he was equally convinced that we do not know this nature in itself."[91]

Understanding clearly what Aquinas means by the temporality of truth, in the sense of the *subjective* temporality of our judgment of truth, Maurer states: "The truth of the human mind, on the contrary, is not eternal but temporal. St. Thomas leaves us in no doubt

[88] Cf. *Summa* I, 84, 1, c.; *Chapter 2*.

[89] I must mention at least that, for Aquinas, there is such a thing as necessity in created beings (separate substances) as well, which is necessity strictly speaking, even if it is not absolute in the way that the necessity of God is absolute.

[90] 95-116.

[91] 104.

on the matter: 'Because our mind is not eternal, neither is the truth of propositions which are formed by us eternal, but it had a beginning in time.'"[92] A few lines later he says,

> Human truth, then, is not eternal, and neither is it unchangeable. Once again St. Thomas is explicit: "The truth of the divine mind is unchangeable, but the truth of our mind is changeable." He does not mean that a truth, say of metaphysics or mathematics, is subject to change, but that the truth of our intellect is.[93]

And, even if Maurer does not give to the truth any kind of existence outside the mind, he does not confound the subjective eternity with the necessity of the content considered *just in itself*:

> "Are there not in the mind of the mathematician and metaphysician necessary truths, i.e. truths that cannot be otherwise? St. Thomas does not deny this, or that (as we shall see) the mind can think about these truths just in themselves, quite apart from their existence in any mind. What he is denying is that any truth exists necessarily in a created mind."[94]

However, this is not the question of historicity of truth. Modern Philosophy is not worried about the eternity of truth in this sense, but about the origin of universality and necessity in human cognition as an *objective* characteristic, which is also Maurer's concern in this article.[95] For this reason, one may wonder why he does not distinguish between the presence of the necessary content in the mind and in the things themselves. One may also wonder why he says that we "can think about these truths in themselves, quite apart from their existence in any mind," and does not add "apart from their existence in the things themselves." It seems clear that, for Maurer, the reason is that there are no such things as universality or truth in the things themselves, but only in the mind.

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[92] 109.
[93] 110.
[94] 111.
[95] Cf. 96-97, note 3.

A few pages later he says that we have the "ability to abstract natures from spatial and temporal conditions. We can form universal concepts and make universal judgments about the things we experience which are true always and everywhere."[96] Regarding judgments, he says that we can,

> [T]hink about them just in themselves, or absolutely, abstracting from the existence they have in a mind. We can focus our attention on them, without considering whether they exist temporally in us or eternally in God. We can do the same thing with a nature or essence when we think of it just in itself, or absolutely, without considering whether it exists as a universal in the mind or as an individual in reality.[97]

But do those things exist in reality or not? "Because truths can be considered absolutely or in themselves, it is tempting to think that they have a kind of entity in themselves, distinct from the being of the mind in which they exist."[98] He ascribes that error to the Platonic distinction between the *esse essentiae* and the *esse existentiae*, which is certainly foreign to the spirit of St. Thomas. But Maurer does not seem to realize that it is also Platonic to think that the universal does not have any other being distinct from the being it has in the mind, because it is Platonic to not distinguish the mode of being of the nature in the mind from the mode of being it has in reality.[99]

A few lines later, Maurer applies to the objective content of truth that which Aquinas says about the subjective eternity of truth, by saying that we can reach "universal truths that transcend the limits of time and matter, while falling short of eternity."[100] What does

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[96] 113.
[97] 113-114.
[98] 114.
[99] Cf. *In Met.* 1, lect. 10, 158; *Chapter 2*.
[100] 114.

Maurer mean? Universal truths, that is, objective universal truths, are a lesser degree of eternity. However, the only eternity being discussed in Aquinas is the *subjective* eternity of truth. In Maurer, therefore, there appears to be an identification between eternity as a condition of the object and as a condition of the subject, which goes beyond the intention of Aquinas. After having denied any existence of the universal essence outside the mind, Maurer is affirming that universality is a state of human knowing dependent on the specific spirituality of the human subject, which is not eternal because the human mind is not eternal. In other words, that because we human beings subjectively transcend matter and time, our universal knowledge can also transcend them;[101] therefore, then, that which gives an account of the transcendence of the object is the transcendence of the subject.

Maurer's understanding of Aquinas' basic orientation is seen where he says, "cognition from the outset opens upon a meaningful world beyond cognition […] one whose intelligibility reveals itself to the mind and which we can share with others."[102] These remarks do not necessarily imply that he agrees with St. Thomas. He tries to support a theory of historicity of truth using Thomistic principles, namely the subjective temporality of human truth and the non-existence of essences in a state of abstraction. However, Maurer seems to overlook a more fundamental principle, that being the existence of the universal as nature in the particular things themselves, the very basis for St. Thomas' position regarding this issue. Maurer, all the same, has the real merit of dealing openly and clearly

[101] Cf. 113.
[102] 116.

with the most important question for Thomism today, that being its answer to Historicism and the Kantian turn to the subject.

W. Norris Clarke

W. Norris Clarke (1915-2008),[103] in his research on the sources and originality of Thomism, lines up enthusiastically with Fabro. It is interesting to note how Clarke's slight preference for a view different from the Italian philosopher's in the first article (for Clarke, St. Thomas is an Aristotelianism specified by Neoplatonism rather than vice versa, as Fabro would propose),[104] becomes an almost complete agreement with Fabro in the second.[105] In this sense, Clarke's work can serve as a perfect introduction to Fabro's overall interpretation of Aquinas.

Aside from this, and for the present study, Clarke's most important and pertinent insight has to do with the role of the metaphysical notion of participation as regards the problem of the universals and abstraction. This notion helps Aquinas to explain the realization of the one in the many, in such a way that there is a real composition in the many between participated perfection and participant (participation always implies a composition) and, at the same time, there is an absolute metaphysical distinction between the participants and the separate perfection (that is, God). The Thomistic notion of participation, understood in this way, implies a double metaphysical distinction: a

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[103] Cf. W. Norris Clarke, SJ., *Explorations in Metaphysics: Person, God, Being* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994, reprinted 2008). The relevant essays are: "The Limitation of Act by Potency in Saint Thomas: Aristotelianism or Neoplatonism?" (pp. 65ff) and "The Meaning of Participation in Saint Thomas" (pp. 89ff).

[104] Cf. 82.

[105] Cf. 98.

distinction intrinsic to the participant (between participated form and participant potency) and a distinction between the being by participation and the intensive unlimited source, the being *per essentiam.* Crucial to this Thomistic notion is that "participation" is applied *analogically* to the different metaphysical levels (*esse* – essence, form – matter, substance-accident, etc.) and that there is also analogy between its metaphysical and logical uses.

The relevance for our topic comes from the notion of participation as the explanation or condition of possibility of the real presence of the one (= the specifically common) in the many. The universal nature is present in all of the individuals that participate it. And this, in turn, will be the condition of possibility of abstraction, as will be seen. Clarke, by interpreting Aquinas' notion in a metaphysical sense, agrees basically with the interpretation of Aquinas being proposed in this thesis.

Clarke's reading of Plato is very helpful, where Clarke says: "In addition to the obvious defect in the Platonic theory of its confusion between the logical and the ontological orders, we would like to call attention to another deficiency too frequently overlooked",[106] a deficiency that, in Clarke's mind, is Plato's inability to "express the participation structure in terms of the limited reception by the participants of a perfection that exists in its source in a state of illimitation or infinity."[107] In other words, what is "obvious" to Clarke is that Plato wants the ontological order to perfectly parallel the logical order (lack of distinction between the two modes of being of the object of knowing) and a further defect (consequence of the first one) is Plato's overlooking the fact that the same

[106] 90.
[107] 90.

perfection is realized in two different ways in the participant and in the source. This helps us to see that, for Clarke, Thomistic participation implies the presence (though limited) of the source's perfection in the particular.

Clarke sees similar defects in the theory of participation held by Aquinas' Neoplatonic sources, for example, the theory's "lack of clear distinction between genuine ontological participations and mere logical subordination of abstract concepts."[108] Clarke continues:

> St. Thomas's originality has consisted in the skill with which, guided by his keen sense of analogy and of the difference between the ontological and the conceptual orders (always so blurred in the Neoplatonists), he has adapted this framework to a realistic metaphysics of existence and an epistemology of abstraction.[109]

This is a very insightful remark. As Clarke seems to imply, what allows St. Thomas to give the world reality is to admit that perfection (and thus being) can be limited (and so in a particular individual), thanks to the notion of participation. There is no need to deny or diminish the reality of the particular, because the perfection of the universal substances can be found in them, although in a limited way. And neither is there a need for Aquinas to postulate a separate source of intelligible content that could match the universality of our concepts: the content of our concepts is in the things themselves (participated nature). For this reason, that which explains knowing is *abstraction from* the individual, and not an illumination from above (in the sense of a participation of the agent object itself[110]).

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[108] 91.

[109] 95.

[110] In *Chapter 4* we will see in what sense Aquinas admits a divine illumination in natural human knowing, namely as a participated light that "makes intelligible."

The doctrine of participation is for Clarke,

> a theory for rendering intelligible a "many" in any order in terms of a higher one, in other words, for explaining the common possession in many subjects of a given attribute, whether in the logical or the ontological order, by reference to a higher source from which all receive or participate in some way the perfection they possess in common.[111]

Note how Clarke supposes that the perfection is ontologically possessed in common by those participating it. The same can be inferred from his consideration of the participated being as a composite unity. For Clarke, Aquinas manages to make sense of the unity of the participated being by strengthening the Neoplatonic notion of participation with the Aristotelian theory of act and potency; this is because, in the end, what required an explanation was the unity of the participated being, not its composition. Clearly, Clarke considers that, for St. Thomas, there is a composition of perfection and limiting potency, which is to say that *both* are present *yet* distinct:

> In other words, what St. Thomas has done is to put his finger on what was perhaps the greatest single weakness of the Neoplatonic doctrine throughout its whole tradition, namely, the lack of any adequate metaphysical explanation to safeguard the intrinsic unity of the compositions resulting from participation.[112]

For Clarke, what is present in each individual could very well be called a "common nature," present totally and equally in each member of the species:

> Since every member of a species receives its specific form totally and equally in the qualitative order, limitation here can mean only restriction in the spatial-quantitative order by comparison with a source which can exist only intentionally as an idea in a mind, where it is endowed with an infinity that is only the negative infinity of indetermination of a universal idea as such.[113]

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[111] 92.

[112] 96.

[113] 97. I think it is evident that Clarke is not suggesting that the universal in the human mind is the source of the nature in the individuals, as if the presence in the individual were explained by

The Thomistic doctrine of participation is "applied with a consummate sense of analogy to the different orders both of reality and of ideas."[114]

It is important to have mentioned Clarke at the beginning of this study, not only for his close connection with Fabro, but particularly for raising the notion of participation in relation to the theory of abstraction.[115] Clarke helps us to see that the notion of participation, once the limits of Plato have been overcome, and once the notion itself has been completed by the Aristotelian framework of act and potency, is able to resolve the problem of the one and the many. The many are one, because the one perfection is participated (partly realized) in each of them; but they are still many because, together with the participated perfection, there is a potency that enters into composition with the perfection. The universal and necessary knowledge, then, corresponds to reality because it is possible to know separately the things that are really distinct (real composition of the participated being), although not really separated (real unity of act and potency).

In other words, the Thomistic theory of abstraction, as currently being proposed, would not make any sense if it were not at least plausible that something like a common perfection, specific nature or essence exists in the particular individual. This alone would make sense of the current claim that, for Aquinas, the universal content comes from outside the mind. Now, the Thomistic notion of participation, because it speaks of a single (= one as common) perfection that is realized in different subjects, seems to offer that

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our act of judgment, etc.. The context of the article discourages such an interpretation. Fabro explains the notion and challenges of predicamental participation and univocal participation in *NMP*, 143ff.

[114] 98.

[115] Cf. 95, quoted above.

plausible explanation of the one being present in the many, and of the real distinction of the co-principles in the individual substance.

John F. X. Knasas

John Knasas (1948-)[116] shares the basic interpretation of Aquinas offered in this thesis. Knasas considers Aquinas an aposteriorism, holding that the intellectual content comes from the sensible things, and that the cognitive powers do not formally constitute the object. Further interpretation in common with Knasas includes the alterity in knowing, the distinction between two modes of being of the object as the explanation of knowing, and the understanding of intentional identity in knowing.

Knasas gives us, as it were, a definition of a formal a priori as regards intellectual knowing. For him, Transcendental Thomism holds "the revisionist claim that Aquinas' understanding of the human intellect includes a crucial *a priori* dimension functioning as a constitutive factor in our consciousness of objects."[117] In fact, Knasas says:

> Maréchal, Rahner, and Lonergan all regard the dynamism of the intellect towards Being as a constitutive factor for our consciousness of beings [later, quoting Maréchal] 'for the subject is really knowing as such only to the extent that he formally takes part in the edification of the object'.[118]

The opposite of this *apriorist* vision is explained in the following terms:

> By calling Aquinas an *aposteriorist* I am not denying the elaborate structure of knowing powers in the human soul, e.g., external senses, common sense, imagination, agent and possible intellects. I simply mean that in relation to actual

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[116] Cf. John F.X. Knasas, "Transcendental Thomism and De Veritate I, 9," in *Thomistic Papers VI*, ed. John Knasas (Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1994), 229–250 (abbreviated *TTDV*); John F.X. Knasas, "Why for Lonergan Knowing Cannot Consist in 'Taking a Look,'" *ACPQ* 78, no. 1 (2004): 131–150 (abbreviated *WLTL*). In the references of this section I will omit Knasas' name.

[117] *TTDV* 230, cf. 232.

[118] *TTDV* 232, cf. *WLTL* 132-133, note 2.

> cognition, these powers are pure conditions for knowledge. The structure of the knowing power performs no constitutive role *vis-à-vis* the known object.[119]

That is to say, Knasas does not deny in Aquinas an "activity" of knowing, the evident subjective aspect of knowing, but he does not see that activity as constitutive of the object. How this active aspect looks in Knasas' account can be taken from his remarks: "In my opinion, the nature-as-finality idea [of Maréchal] as applied to the intellect need mean only the intellect's ordination to *abstract* intelligible content from the real. By itself the idea fails to mean any projection of content upon the data."[120] In other words, for Knasas, the opposite of a formal a priori is a subjectivity that takes from reality the intelligible content. Such subjectivity is able to take from, not to project upon, nor to produce:

> What the intellect has of itself is not a drive to the notion of being that is then used constitutively in regard to sense. Rather, the intellect of itself is inclined to abstract the *ratio entis* from the sense data that it can appreciate as real […] Lonergan and Transcendental Thomists assume that every inclination of a power is an inclination to impose a tendency. But inclination can also be an inclination to abstract rather than to project.[121]

Knasas says: "Both Boyer and myself understand the truth judgment as bearing upon a mental act whose content the intellect has drawn from the sensible real. […] No constitutive a priori factor precedes the formation of the proposition."[122]

In an aposterioristic theory, Knasas says, "… what is seen in the data is the decisive epistemological moment for assessing the correctness of the judgment." [123] and quotes

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[119] *TTDV* 229-230 note 2.
[120] *TTDV* 230 note 2.
[121] *WLTL* 149-150. As for Knasas' doctrine regarding judgment, I do not necessarily share all of it.
[122] *TTDV* 245 note 27.
[123] *WLTL* 136.

Owens in confirmation: "The cause and criterion of the certainty is the existence that is apprehended."[124] For Knasas it is a problem that "the data of sense are accorded reality in and through its relation to something subjective – the mind's intention of being."[125] It is clear that for Knasas, in judgment also, the intelligible content is taken from the sensible.

He does not believe that certain passages of the *Summa* could be used to support the opposite view:

> Angels have innate species of things, and humans have innate knowledge of first principles. But the texts admit the interpretation that in our case the first principles are inborn because we are naturally disposed to abstract them so easily. Similarly, we say that someone is a natural born baseball player. This remark does not mean that the individual is born with the ability to throw a curve ball.[126]

Although rather a long text, the following is useful in making clear that, for Knasas, the agent intellect is not a formal a priori and the intelligible content comes from sensible things by abstraction:

> Wilkins ends… by claiming that the efficient cause of understanding is the agent intellect, which he describes as the spirit of wonder and the active orientation towards the unknown. Citing *S.T*. I-II, 94, 2, *De ver*. 11, 1c, and *C.G.* II, 83, Wilkins identifies the unknown with the notion of being which should be distinguished from the concept of being as the more primitive from the derived. […] In my opinion, this is the Thomistic Achilles heal of Transcendental Thomism. There is no distinction between the notion of being and the concept of being, *pace* Rousselot. Taking up the *De ver.* I, 1's *primum cognitum* description of the *ratio entis*, *De ver.* XXI, 1c, characterizes the *ratio entis* as the "*prima conceptio intellectus*." Also, at Wilkins's cited *De ver.* XI, 1c, the *ratio entis*, again described as one of "*prima conceptiones intellectus*," is not regarded as belonging to the agent intellect but as known immediately by abstraction from sensible things. *Contra* Lonergan, what antedates

[124] Quoted again in *WLTL* 141.

[125] *WLTL* 137, cf. *WLTL* 138.

[126] *WLTL* 139. Texts like these will be discussed in *Chapter 4*. I find Knasas's interpretation very much in line with my own.

> the concept of being is not the intending of being but sensible things and an abstraction from sensible things.[127]

The following text may help to explain a preference for speaking of intellectual knowing as being "receptive of objective content." He says: "Sensation is nothing other than a direct and immediate presence of something real, or as Aquinas says at *De Ver.* 2, 2c: "*Existens perfectio unius, est nata esse in altero*."[128] What is interesting is that in this text, Aquinas is defining not only sensation, but cognition in general. I suggest that, insofar as the universal content is real, and is immediately present *through the intelligible species*, the simple apprehension can be said to be "receptive of objective content," as sensation is. This is meant not insofar as there is no mediation at all (which would be the case with sensible intuition), but insofar as there is no objective mediation; what is known is precisely what is "out there," the (common) nature, and the intellect has direct contact with it.[129]

It seems apparent that Knasas considers it crucial to distinguish the modes of being of the known perfection in the explanation of knowing: "*formal* reception of form assures that the received form remains numerically identical with the form of the real thing. As Owens says: '[…] It is individually the same form, actuating both child and percipient in two different ways of existing. It makes the percipient be the individual that exists in reality'" and in note, still Owens: "In the object [of sensation] there are the quidditative and

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[127] *WLTL* 147. Another text for the origin of the intelligible content is in *WLTL* 148: "The experience of animals does not generate questions in them, because animals do not abstract being from their experience."

[128] *WLTL* 142.

[129] Perhaps related with the previous, Knasas also points out that Aquinas does not mind speaking about intelligence in terms of vision: "I have noted that at *In I Sent.* d. 19, q. 5, a.1, ad 7m, Aquinas is locked into ocularity. Aquinas describes the character of the first two operations as '*respicere.*'" (*WLTL* 146).

existential factors. As impressed passively on the sentient power both those aspects enter into the actuation of the faculty."[130]

I take "formal" reception to mean "intentional" reception. I find very appealing the fact that Knasas considers the identity "numerical." That is, it is a great insight, but at the same time, it involves a great danger. The insight is that, if what is known is present in the knower in some way, there can be absolutely no difference between the known out there and the known present in the subject, *insofar as we speak of the content*. However, if the distinction between content and mode of being of the content is not made, there results either the problem of identifying *in reality* the object with the subject (which is one of my concerns with some interpretations of Aquinas) or the problem of not explaining properly this identity-in-alterity which knowing seems to be. In other words, it is not enough to affirm that there is an identity of two things that are not the same: we need to explain this identity's condition of possibility. Or, if one prefers, it is enough to affirm the fact as long as the matter is set for discussion; but once this is done, it is here that Epistemology begins.

For the reasons previously exposed (particularly his apparent lack of interest in the theory of the agent intellect) it does not seem that Owens, in his *Cognition*, gives the explanation that is required. If there is a different mode of being of the same thing (the object), there needs to be an explanation of this different mode of being, and this explanation is to be found in the doctrine of the agent intellect. Knasas is very much in

[130] *WLTL* 142, my emphasis.

agreement with the Epistemology of Owens, as Knasas himself claims,[131] but it is not known to me if Knasas gives a better explanation elsewhere. The point I would suggest is that the emphasis on the efficiency of the object does explain the presence *of the content* (insofar as the presence of the like is explained by the like), but it is missing the explanation of the different mode of being of the object, and particularly of the state of abstraction that the object finds in intelligence. It may be that, because the texts quoted refer rather to sensibility, the necessity of an explanation of the mode of being does not seem necessary (because an agent sense is not required). However, if the effect of the sensible object is not only physical but cognitional, do we not need the Thomistic celestial bodies or separate substances to make sense of the intentional effect? In what sense, otherwise, is there a "numerical" identity of known and knower? The natural efficiency is not enough, because the forms would be only "specifically" identical.

Accused of falling into "knowing by confrontation," Knasas says: "In fact, since my realism is immediate, my realism is knowledge by identity rather than confrontation."[132] The problem with the confrontation paradigm, it is said, is that there needs to be a bridge to reach the object. But that bridge is not required for Knasas, because "The real is not just 'the out there.' The real is also 'the out there that is in here.'"[133] We find the outside inside, and that is why the so-called bridge is not needed. It is a powerful exposition of the fact of

[131] "If Wilkins is interested in the entire sweep of the epistemology in which my remarks are embedded, he could read Joseph Owens's, *Cognition: An Epistemological Inquiry* and Part Three of his *Elementary Christian Metaphysics*" (*WLTL* 146).

[132] *WLTL* 144.

[133] *WLTL* 144.

knowing, and Knasas is talking about identity as the intentional presence of the object to the subject.

However, consideration should be given to speaking about this as not simply identity, in order to not dilute the otherness of the object. There is in knowing a confrontation, insofar as there is an "out there", and there is also an identity, insofar as the out there is "in here" or "immediately present," as Knasas says. "Intentional identity" or "intentional presence" could convey these same thoughts in a better fashion. Because knowing is a mode of being as "presence in/to *the other*," saying only "identity" may obscure half of the mystery. This, however, is more a matter of terms than of doctrine. Knasas says:

> Identity of sense and sensible is only half the story. As noted above, when sense receives the form, sense does not subjectivize the form. Rather, since the reception is formal [read: "intentional"], *the otherness* of the received form is left intact. The objectivity of sensation is guaranteed […] Again, knowledge by way of identity means that the knower becomes the real.[134]

I agree with Knasas in his aposterioristic reading of Aquinas and his definition of a formal a priori. With greater exposure to Knasas' works, it might be possible to see whether he is elsewhere more specific regarding the explanation of the distinction of the modes of being of the known, and of identity in knowing. However, his understanding of intentionality and of the cognitional fact are very precise, where he says: "The real is not just 'the out there.' The real is also 'the out there that is in here.'"[135]

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[134] *WLTL* 145-146, my emphasis.

[135] *WLTL* 144. My interpretation of *De Ver*. 1, 9 is different from the one proposed by Knasas in "Transcendental Thomism and *De Veritate* I, 9*."* Basically, and in my view, Aquinas is first talking about the presence of truth in every judgment (*Consequitur*, etc.), and second about the presence of

4) Cornelio Fabro

Finally, we arrive at Cornelio Fabro (1911-1995),[136] the philosopher who inspired this discussion about the agent intellect as a metaphysical a priori. Although the interpretation of the agent intellect in the current proposal is based on the same general epistemological orientation as that of Fabro, the agent intellect as metaphysical a priori is spoken of somewhat differently in the current view than in Fabro's. To begin, let us consider some of the principles of his Epistemology, and then more particularly his doctrine on the agent intellect.

The alterity of the object of knowing, the explanation of knowing by the distinction of the modes of being of the known perfection, and the origin of the intellectual content in the object itself, are clear features of Fabro's doctrine about knowing as participation:

> It seems therefore that "knowing" realizes, in the realm of nature, "participating" in the full sense of the term. To know is to assimilate and to become similar, is to possess the act and the form of another thing insofar as the act and the form are

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truth as known in Metaphysics (*Cognoscitur*, etc.). That is why the intellect has to know first its own nature (as part of the definition of truth, *adaequatio rei* etc.); and this is the reflection St. Thomas is talking about, a metaphysical reflection, which is the same as the *reditio completa* that allows the intellect to know its *essentia propria*. In other words, we do not need to know the essence of the intellect to know *a truth*, that is, to know the truth regarding something and to affirm it: in this case, we need only to know "what's going on." But we do need to know the essence of the intellect as the faculty of knowing being, in order to know *what truth is*, as *adaequatio rei et intellectus.* The objection that St. Thomas is also speaking about truth in sensibility (in the first sense), should be put into context, noticing that he speaks about a *judgment* in the senses as well, and that the senses know *that they sense*: he is therefore not speaking of any faculty of sense, but of a particular operation of the internal senses, that is analogous to judgment, and only in that sense can be said to possess the truth. It should be clear that, for St. Thomas, the truth is *adaequatio rei et* ***intellectus judicantis***, and therefore the senses (and even the intellect insofar as it apprehends) are excluded from possessing the truth, properly speaking.

[136] The following remarks focus on Fabro, Cornelio, *La Nozione Metafisica di Partecipazione secondo San Tommaso d'Aquino* (*NMP*); and *La Svolta Antropologica di Karl Rahner* (*LS*), already quoted. As I have been doing with other authors, I will omit Fabro's name in the references to his works in this section.

> and remain of the other thing. Is it the case, then, that one and the same act is, at the same time and under the same respect, act of different subjects, the knower and the known? Yes, but Thomistic Aristotelism adds immediately, *not in the same way*. The act and the form are present in the object known in a physical and real way, in the subject, instead, in an objective and "intentional" way, that is to say by means of an "*intermediary*", the "species" (impressa) which is the quality that disposes the subject to enter into that participation. By means of this qualitative modification, which has all its *ratio* [italian: *ragione*] and structure from the object and that comes to emerge upon the being of the knower as a flower upon the stem, it appears clear that knowing is truly a "participating."[137]

Regarding Aquinas' agent intellect, Fabro in *La Svolta* (cf. *LS* 52 and 116) refers to it as a metaphysical a priori in opposition to Rahner's formal a priori. In *LS*, Fabro refers to what he had written in his previous *NMP* (cf. 272-273). The respective contexts of the two works are different from each other. Let us examine each of them.

4.1. A Metaphysical A Priori in *The Metaphysical Notion of Participation*

In *La Nozione Metafisica di Partecipazione* (*NMP*), Fabro is distinguishing the Platonic "objective" participation of the intelligible (i.e., the content of knowing as bestowed on human intelligence) from the Thomistic "subjective" participation of a light making intelligible. Fabro here does not use the terms "metaphysical" participation nor "a priori" for the agent intellect, but it is evident that 1) the agent intellect is, for Fabro, a subjective participation insofar as it is a *real* subjective faculty derived from God in order to make intelligible, and that 2) human knowing is not verified by a participation of the intelligible *content* in a Platonic way. Although, in using the term "intelligible," Fabro does not differentiate between the content and its mode of being,[138] it seems clear that he considers

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[137] *NMP* 270.

[138] "The agent intellect is principle productive [*fattivo*] of the **intelligible** and this **intelligible** comes to us, not by direct participation from God, but by a complex work of abstraction exercised

the content of the intelligible as coming from the sensible things, "by a complex work of abstraction exercised by the participated light, the agent intellect, in the realm of the concrete and diffuse participation of the sensible world" (then he quotes the text of Aquinas at 84, 4 ad 1, in which the content of knowing is said to come from the forms of sensible things). Without saying it explicitly, Fabro suggests two participations in intellectual knowing and both, of course, as derived from God. The first is a participation of the light (subjective participation, the agent intellect) and the second is a participation of the content, which also comes from God, not directly, but through the forms of sensible things. And precisely because our *direct* participation from God is not of the content, but of the light making intelligible, the agent intellect is a subjective, not an objective participation. The content as well comes remotely from God, as the source of all truth, but only (naturally) through the concrete participations of His eternal ideas in the forms of the sensible things.

For Fabro, the content of intellectual knowing is the nature existing in the sensible things. In fact, he says that the human idea is not an intensive intelligible "totality", like the infused idea of the angels, because it does not come by (objective) participation but by abstraction. And he continues:

> Matter, which in concrete beings is principle of ontological limitation of the form, becomes for our abstracting mind an obstacle to intelligibility […] From an objective point of view, that is to say, the point of view of the noetic content, the human idea, possessed by abstraction, is said knowledge by participation in the strong sense […]

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by the participated light, the agent intellect, in the realm of the concrete and diffuse participations of the sensible world" (*NMP* 272-273, see the complete text in question in *Appendix*, Note 22). In my view, the first "intelligible" is the species with its content, but the second is rather the content of the species. It is evident that, for Fabro, what the agent intellect produces comes also, in a certain sense, from the sensible things, but he does not make a clear distinction, in the use of the word "intelligible", between the aspect that is produced and the one that is, rather, received.

> insofar as [it] "*est similitudo formae tantum"*; it does not reach the matter, and so the human idea, as such, will arrive always at a general and undetermined content.[139]

From *NMP* can be seen that the agent intellect is a subjective participation insofar as it is not a participation of the intelligible content (which comes from the things themselves) but a participation of a light in the subject, a light that, by abstraction, makes intelligible the forms of the real things. There is not a clear distinction, in what Fabro calls the "intelligible," between content and mode of being of the content, and so it may not be so clear in what sense the agent intellect "makes intelligible." However, he does say that the intelligible species "has all its *ratio* [ragione] and structure from the object"[140] and he also distinguishes in the human idea the "point of view of the noetic content"[141] in which the human idea is a likeness of the form of the sensible things. Therefore, even if Fabro does not refer to the agent intellect explicitly as productive of the intelligible mode of being of the content (that which *I myself* call "metaphysical a priori"), he would surely deny that it is productive of the intelligible content itself. The content of human knowing is a participation of the form of sensible things by which *we* are perfected, and not a participation of our own light in them, by which they would receive intelligibility as content.

4.2. A Metaphysical A Priori in *La Svolta*

In *La Svolta* (*LS*), Fabro speaks explicitly of the agent intellect as a metaphysical a priori in opposition to Rahner's formal a priori. There are two clear texts, both in footnote:

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[139] *NMP* 274.
[140] *NMP* 270.
[141] *NMP* 274.

LS 52, and *LS* 116. In the first Fabro claims that, in Rahner, the agent intellect is a formal a priori in the sense of a Kantian transcendental, and Fabro uses the term "metaphysical" to express his own reading of the agent intellect in Aquinas.[142] In the second, Fabro does not use the term "metaphysical" but "productive" [*fattivo*]. Here he explains a little more of what he means to say. However, because the contexts are somehow different, and his expressions are very dense, it appears necessary to offer an explanation of what Fabro meant, in order to show the similarities and differences between his position and the position being proposed in this thesis.

In *LS* 116, the context is the following. For Fabro, Rahner identifies *abstractio*, *conversio* and *reditio* in intellectual knowing in this way: *abstractio* (to know the intelligible) is *reditio*, i.e., to know oneself (the only intelligible) as being in the world (*conversio ad phantasmata*); in other words, to know the intelligible (*abstractio*) is an action of self-consciousness (and so a *reditio*) upon the material of sensibility (*conversio*). Fabro, in responding to Rahner, uses 84, 6 (the text of "*materia causae*"[143]) to show that, for Aquinas, the relationship with sensibility is not that which alone verifies intellectual knowing, but intellectual knowing is an operation of a higher level, exercised upon a higher object. At this point comes, in a footnote, Fabro's observation that Rahner uses the same text[144] to draw the opposite conclusion, that the agent intellect is a formal a priori or, in other words, that the action of intelligence is exercised on the material of sensibility in a Kantian fashion.

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[142] Fabro quotes here *NMP* 272-273.
[143] We will examine this particular text in *Chapter 4*, section 1.
[144] *Summa* I, 84, 6.

Fabro claims that, for Aquinas, the agent intellect is rather an a priori as effective [*fattivo*] principle, as *faciens intelligibilia*, and not a formal or constitutive principle.[145]

The agent intellect, for Fabro, is not that which provides intelligibility to the material of sensibility (and therefore intelligibility as content), nor is it a projection of consciousness (the first "object" of intelligence) on the sensible material from experience. The agent intellect is, instead, that which makes the intelligible from the sensible, and that intelligible is the first object of intelligence. What Aquinas says in 84, 6, for Rahner, is that the agent intellect informs the material of sensibility with intelligibility as content and, therefore, that the action of the intellect (the *knowing* action) is exercised on the sensible; whereas for Fabro, Aquinas is saying the opposite, that is, that the act of intelligence is exercised not on matter but on something higher (the universal), which requires precisely the action of the agent intellect on the material of sensibility: not, though, as informing it with intelligible content, but as making the universal species. It is this "making the universal" which renders the agent intellect an a priori as productive principle, and not a formal one, as if it were a formal (intelligible) "part" of the object itself.

Therefore, when in *LS* 52 Fabro speaks of "metaphysical a priori", he means a subjective participation which is the condition of possibility of intellectual knowing insofar as it *produces the intelligible species*, which is the agent object of the knowing operation of intelligence. As a formal a priori, instead, the light of the agent intellect constitutes formally the object of knowing, providing intelligibility *as content* to an otherwise sensible object.

[145] The difference between "productive" and "formal" is related to the difference between an efficient cause and a formal cause. The formal cause constitutes the "formed" thing together with the matter, whereas the efficient cause produces the presence of the form in the matter.

Fabro does not say, therefore, that the agent intellect is a metaphysical a priori insofar as it produces the intelligible mode of being of the content (which is the way that expression is used in this thesis), but insofar as it produces the intelligible species (without further specifications). However, Fabro's denial of the agent intellect in Aquinas as a formal a priori and his affirmations regarding the origin of the noetic content in the sensible reality, are very much in line with the claim presently being made.

4.3. Intellectual Knowing as Receptive in Fabro

We have considered the use of the term "metaphysical a priori" in Fabro. Now, in this dissertation, the intellectual apprehension is portrayed as *reception* of the universal content, a reception verified by abstraction of that content from experience, through the work of the agent intellect. This interpretation, as we have said, is a means to oppose the Kantian notion of intellectual activity as, in some way, providing the universal content. For Fabro, in a similar way, the difference between Aquinas and Modern Philosophy is that Aquinas maintains, at the beginning of the process of intellectual knowing, an abstractive absolute *apprehension* parallel to the intuitive absolute apprehension with which the process of sensible knowing begins.[146] The interpretation being offered here is in agreement with Fabro, insofar as for Kant the universal is a *product* of the intellectual activity (as giving intelligible form to the raw material of experience) whereas, for Aquinas, it is the beginning of that activity (as original reception of intelligible content).

[146] Cf. Cornelio Fabro, *Percezione e Pensiero*, 2nd Revised Edition (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1962), 423 (abbreviated *PP*).

5) Other Relevant Authors

Although the contributions of certain authors will be studied in the body of this dissertation, it seems useful that the following authors be given at least a brief mention in the introduction to this work.[147]

Tsenay Serequeberhan,[148] as regards the agent intellect in Aquinas and the Kantian categories, rightly relates both to the solution of the same problem, namely, the intellectual and universal knowledge of reality. However, Serequeberhan considers that which is rather a superficial analogy between these two realities (the fact that both are active in their respective systems)[149] to be a shared fundamental view between Kant and Aquinas.[150] What is interesting about this article is that, since Serequeberhan is not deceived about Kant's

[147] Three other works are briefly studied in *Appendix*, Note 1: John Haldane, "Aquinas and the Active Intellect," *Philosophy* (UK) 67 (1992): 199-210; Wayne J. Hankey, "Participatio Divini Luminis, Aquinas' Doctrine of the Agent Intellect: Our Capacity for Contemplation," *Dionysius* 22 (2004): 149-178; R. E. Houser, "Philosophical Development through Metaphor: Light among the Greeks," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 64 (1990): 75-85.

[148] Cf. Tsenay Serequeberhan, "Aquinas and Kant: a Comparative Study," *Dialogue: Journal of Phi Sigma Tau* 26 (1984): 40-48. The authors' names are omitted in this section's references, as long as the reference is under the corresponding title.

[149] The "concepts" of Aquinas are separated by Kant from their original "paradigm" but they are preserved with a new "content" in Kant's own paradigm: "the passive intellect becomes the *Faculty of Sensibility*, which is the receptive and passive faculty of the mind; the agent intellect becomes the *Faculty of Understanding,* which is the spontaneous and active faculty of the mind; and the Soul becomes *Transcendental Apperception*, which is the grounding of the whole composite of sensibility and understanding" (44, cf. 47-48).

[150] Serequeberhan, in his conclusive phrase, says that "despite their *radically* differing philosophical perspectives, they share certain *fundamental* views which are not obvious" (48, my emphasis). He does show an understanding of the radical difference between the two, but if what is radical and what is fundamental are both differing and shared, I really wonder if this does not betray an attempt to mix water and oil. It needs to be clarified, however, that Serequeberhan wrote this article very early in his career, and is now specialized in African Philosophy, so I cannot ascertain by this one article his overall philosophical position.

and Aquinas'[151] differing respective views on the origin of the intellectual content, the danger of likening the agent intellect to the Kantian transcendental is more evident and, for a proper interpretation of Aquinas, the necessity of a distinction between that which the agent intellect produces and that which the categories contribute becomes more pressing.

Hernán Martínez Millán[152] tries to show how the analogies of the sun and the light are integrated in Aquinas' doctrine. The analogy of the sun satisfies the need for a first cause in human knowing (something more Christian and Patristic),[153] and the analogy of the light shows how the necessity of a first cause does not take away a proper level of proximate causality in the creature (something more Aristotelian and, in Martínez Millán's view, "existentialist", maybe in the anti-Platonic sense of attributing real being to the particular things). These reflections seem helpful for the interpretation of Aquinas, since they provide a plausible explanation for the systematic unity of elements coming from different sources.

Christopher Cullen's[154] worries about a Kantian influence in Transcendental Thomism are very clear. One of Cullen's concerns is the idea that the origin of intellectual content is not in sensible experience: "Donceel even says, 'For Transcendental Thomism… being is

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[151] "Aquinas derives the agent intellect from the fact that human beings actually engage in the process of abstraction […] the forms of material things […] do not exist as distinct entities, but inhere in matter […] Human intellect, when it understands material things by grasping their 'species,' does so by penetrating the natures or forms of sensible things" (42-43).

[152] Cf. Hernán Martínez Millán, "Sun and Light, or on the Agent Intellect," *Revista Española De Filosofía Medieval* 20 (2013): 49-56.

[153] Cf. 55.

[154] Cf. Christopher M. Cullen, S.J., "Transcendental Thomism: Realism Rejected" in *The Failure of Modernism: The Cartesian Legacy and Contemporary Pluralism*, ed. Brendan Sweetman (American Maritain Association Publications, 1999), 72-86.

contributed a priori by the intellect itself.' Being comes to us through the senses but in no way from the senses."[155] Regarding Rahner in particular, Cullen says: "Rahner also gives much emphasis to the importance of the judgment, for he seeks an a priori ground for all affirmation of finite esse. Rahner believes that sensation cannot ground universality or necessity."[156]

Cullen worries that the doctrine of the agent intellect is used to produce a Kantian interpretation of Aquinas. Cullen says: "Rahner is very clear that Aquinas does not think there are any innate ideas. Nevertheless, Rahner does argue that there is an a priori element of knowledge and that this a priori element is contributed by the agent intellect."[157] "Donceel explains that Transcendental Thomists argue that the agent intellect contributes 'something' to sense experience."[158] To consider the agent intellect a formal a priori is, for Cullen, a misinterpretation of Aquinas:

> The Transcendental Thomists have misinterpreted Aquinas's doctrine of the agent intellect in various ways. First, they have made the light of the agent intellect to be the formal cause of our knowledge. Secondly, they have made the light of the agent intellect to be the habitual knowledge of the first principles (always implicit but made explicit in the science of metaphysics)[159] directly contradicting Aquinas's teaching in his *Disputed Questions on the Soul* [he refers q.5 c, which is *Q.D. De Anima* a.5, c.][160]

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[155] 75.

[156] 77.

[157] 78.

[158] 78.

[159] Cf. Cullen, 79: "Donceel argues that we are 'entitled to conclude that the light of the agent intellect consists precisely in the truth of the first principles,' and that these first principles are 'the a priori contribution of our intellect to every object we know.'"

[160] 83. Cf. Cullen, 85: "For St. Thomas being is not contributed to knowing by the intellect nor is it the formal cause of knowledge. But to make the transcendental turn is to isolate the intellect within the intellectual order."

Cullen also says: "This misinterpretation of the agent intellect doctrine in Thomas leads the Transcendentalists to justify their transcendental turn, which in turn leads to their fundamental metaphysical doctrines."[161] It is interesting that, for Cullen, it is a misinterpretation of St. Thomas' agent intellect which leads to the "justification" of a Kantian turn to the subject. Note that Cullen does not say that the agent intellect is taken as an "excuse" for the Kantian turn. What Cullen's statement arguably means is that, once the transcendental turn is taken for granted, that is, as the only rational way to do philosophy today, Aquinas' doctrine of the agent intellect, misinterpreted, can justify the turn from a Thomistic point of view, given the concerns that Modern Philosophy has always raised in Catholic environments. Regardless of his interpretation of Transcendental Thomism, Cullen's statement helps us to see the relevance of an interpretation of Aquinas which distinguishes clearly the Thomist agent intellect from a Kantian formal a priori. Hopefully, by trying to identify in Aquinas and Kant two differing approaches to the same problem (that of the universals), something more helpful will be offered to modern scholarship than what could be offered by focusing on other authors' interpretations of Aquinas.

Elena Baltuta[162] seems to propose that the universal exists in the extramental thing itself, and is abstracted from it by the agent intellect.[163] Although she does not emphasize,

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[161] 83-84.

[162] Cf. Elena Baltuta, "Thomas Aquinas on Bridging the Gap between Mind and Reality," *Revue Roumaine De Philosophie* 56, no. 1 (2012): 147-60.

[163] "The mark of the individuality present in the *images* must be removed and, at the same time, the object's universal essence, the informational core of the extra mental object, must be kept. This is performed by the action of the *agent intellect*, which illuminates and abstracts the *intelligible species* from the *images*" (151).

as is done herein, that the universal content is the same but the mode of being is different (in reality or in the mind), she does lead to this point by comparing the agent intellect to an x-ray apparatus which lets hidden things be seen while leaving the rest invisible.[164] In my view, Baltuta does not maintain that the agent intellect has a cognitive character, although some passages from her work may lead us to think that way.[165] For Baltuta, rather, the agent intellect seems to be a condition for the possibility of the extramental things' universal essences having visibility.

Héctor Zagal Arreguín, in his article,[166] strongly criticizes Aquinas' interpretation of the Aristotelian agent intellect, pointing out several inconsistencies he perceives in St. Thomas, both internal (lack of systematic coherence) and exegetical (lack of faithfulness to Aristotle). In Zagal Arreguín's appreciation of Aquinas there seems to be a certain lack of familiarity with the meaning of important Thomistic metaphysical notions and distinctions (particularly, the notion of participation, the distinctions between active and passive potency, etc.). More acquaintance with these notions would probably help this author to see at least the internal coherence of Aquinas' doctrine. Still, in his interpretation of

[164] "What was first visible only in potency […] becomes visible in act and, at the same time, the skin, its color […] become invisible. Acting just like such an apparatus the *agent intellect* does not need the ability to 'see' both sensible particulars and immaterial universals for being able to abstract the latter ones from the images" (157).

[165] "The agent intellect removes the individual and material characteristics of the object from its essence. But how can the agent intellect tell the difference between what is particular (individual) and what is universal in an *image*? […] would we be entitled to believe that, since it has the power of discriminating and removing individual elements from universal ones, it has access to both particular and universal features?" (155).

[166] Cf. Héctor Zagal Arreguín, "The Separate Substances and Aquinas' Intellectus Agens," *Revista Portuguesa De Filosofia* 64, no. 1 (2008): 359-377.

Aquinas, Zagal Arreguín expresses very well the proposed portrayal of the agent intellect as a metaphysical a priori, when he says,

> What makes [the agent intellect] therefore in act with respect to inteligible objects is the fact that it is an active immaterial force able to assimilate other things to itself, i.e., immaterialize them. In this way it renders actually intelligible something that was only potentially intelligible: like light, which without containing any particular color, brings colors into act.[167]

This review of several authors has hopefully made clear the timeliness and possible benefits of a discussion, such as that being proposed in this dissertation, about the role of the agent intellect in Aquinas. Several issues of interpretation of Aquinas' text have been raised, those being the question of a common nature, the distinction between intelligibility as content and as mode of being of the content, the proper meaning of the Aristotelian identity, etc.. It is hoped that what follows will be helpful regarding these and other related questions.

[167] 367.

Chapter One: The Thomistic Fact and the Role of the Agent Intellect

1) The Thomistic Fact

In order to understand what the agent intellect is for St. Thomas, it is important to understand why St. Thomas requires an agent intellect in human intellectual knowing. The precise text in which he deals with this point in the *Summa* is 79, 3. The immediate purpose is to show how, for St. Thomas, the fact that we know the universal aspect of corporeal things, their nature, requires an agent intellect as its condition of possibility. The agent intellect is the "light" making intelligible in act the nature of corporeal things.

In the *corpus*, St. Thomas begins to make his point by establishing a contrast with the Platonic doctrine of ideas:

> According to the opinion of Plato, there is no need for an active intellect in order to make things actually intelligible […] For Plato supposed that the forms of natural things subsisted apart from matter, and consequently that they are intelligible: since a thing is actually intelligible from the very fact that it is immaterial. And he called such forms 'species or ideas'.[168]

Both for Aristotle and for Plato, the object of human understanding is the nature or form of corporeal things. However, because in the Platonic system those forms are already intelligible in act in their real being, an agent intellect is not needed for Plato, at least not in the way it is needed for Aristotle: "But since Aristotle did not allow that forms of natural things exist apart from matter, and as forms existing in matter are not actually intelligible; it

[168] 79, 3, c.: "Secundum opinionem Platonis, nulla necessitas erat ponere intellectum agentem ad faciendum intelligibilia in actu […] Posuit enim Plato formas rerum naturalium sine materia subsistere, et per consequens eas intelligibiles esse, quia ex hoc est aliquid intelligibile actu, quod est immateriale. Et huiusmodi vocabat species, sive ideas…" Cf. *In I De Anima* 4, 106-111.

follows that the natures or forms of the sensible things which we understand are not actually intelligible."[169]

This point is important. For St. Thomas, it is a *fact* that we understand the nature of the sensible things. This is the reason he interrupts the flow of the phrase with the relative sentence, "*quas intelligimus*." On the other hand, it is also a fact that, since their real being is individuated in matter, those forms are not intelligible in act. These two facts or, better said, this double-sided fact, is what requires an agent intellect as its condition of possibility:

> Now nothing is reduced from potentiality to act except by something in act; as the senses [are] made actual by what is actually sensible. We must therefore assign on the part of the intellect some power to make things actually intelligible, by abstraction of the species from material conditions. And such is the necessity for an active intellect.[170]

In other words, if we understand the nature of corporeal things it is because they are for us already intelligible in act.[171] We would not understand those things in act if they

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[169] 79, 3, c.: "Sed quia Aristoteles non posuit formas rerum naturalium subsistere sine materia; formae autem in materia existentes non sunt intelligibiles actu, sequebatur quod naturae seu formae rerum sensibilium, quas intelligimus, non essent intelligibiles actu."

[170] 79, 3, c.: "Nihil autem reducitur de potentia in actum, nisi per aliquod ens actu, sicut sensus fit in actu per sensibile in actu. Oportebat igitur ponere aliquam virtutem ex parte intellectus, quae faceret intelligibilia in actu, per abstractionem specierum a conditionibus materialibus. Et haec est necessitas ponendi intellectum agentem."

[171] Cf. 85, 1, ob. 4. There is a metaphysical priority of the intelligible in act (= species impressa) over the intellect in act (= species expressa). The result of the action of the agent intellect on the phantasm is the intelligible in act, but not yet "intellected" in act; the intelligible in act, as agent object, "causes" the possible intellect to understand, to pass from potency to act of understanding. The agent intellect produces the passage from potency to act *of being intelligible* (regarding the nature of corporeal things); the agent object (already intelligible in act) produces the passage from potency to act of understanding. The two passages are clear for example in 79, 7, c.: "Nevertheless there is a distinction between the power of the active intellect and of the passive intellect: because as regards the same object, the active power which makes the object to be in act must be distinct from the passive power, which is moved by the object existing in act." [Diversificatur tamen potentia intellectus agentis, et intellectus possibilis, quia respectu eiusdem obiecti, aliud principium oportet esse potentiam activam, quae facit obiectum esse in actu; et aliud

were not already intelligible in act (our intellect is in potency to all intelligible things). But because those natures do not subsist in that way (intelligible in act), there is a need for some efficient power to make them pass from intelligible in potency[172] to intelligible in act. Herein lies the necessity for an agent intellect. And because what prevents something from being intelligible in act is matter, the way to make it pass from potentially to actually intelligible is a sort of separation of its nature from its individual matter; this is called abstraction. It is this sort of action which the agent intellect will be called to perform. The whole of Thomistic Epistemology announces itself. Our immediate concern, however, is to establish as it were a point of departure for this discussion, or better said, the Thomistic point of departure or "Thomistic fact." Nothing can be understood if it is not intelligible in act. Nothing is intelligible in act if it is not separated from matter. Now, we do understand the nature of corporeal things and certainly they are not separated from matter (this is the "Thomistic fact"). Therefore, what is required is a power which makes intelligible in act the nature of corporeal things, by means of a certain separation from their individual conditions in matter.[173]

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potentiam passivam, quae movetur ab obiecto in actu existente.] Cf. section 4 of this *Chapter*, and *Chapter 3*, section 4, where the nature of this "movement" of the possible intellect is also explored.

[172] The meaning of this being "intelligible in potency" will be explored in more detail in *Chapter 4*, section 2.

[173] An interesting parallel regarding the necessity of the agent intellect in human beings is found in *Summa* I, 54, 4, c: "The necessity for admitting an active intellect is due to this—that the natures of the material things which we understand do not exist outside the soul, as immaterial and actually intelligible, but are only intelligible in potentiality so long as they are outside the soul. Consequently it is necessary that there should be some power capable of rendering such natures actually intelligible." [Necessitas autem ponendi intellectum agentem fuit, quia naturae rerum materialium, *quas nos intelligimus*, non subsistunt extra animam immateriales et intelligibiles in actu, sed sunt solum intelligibiles in potentia, *extra animam existentes*, et ideo oportuit esse aliquam virtutem, quae faceret *illas naturas* intelligibiles actu.]

As clear as these issues may seem (at least from a direct reading of Aquinas' text), a whole range of questions begins to arise. Some of them will be treated in the following pages, but two of them can be proposed now. Firstly, does this doctrine make sense? Could Aquinas really mean that? Although the second question is the immediate concern of this dissertation, it is actually the first which prevents some of Aquinas' readers from understanding him. Still, it is by directly facing the second question, which is a question of interpretation, that the path for the clarification of the first question may be open. In other words, if a plausible case can be made that Aquinas really meant the doctrine that is here suggested and, if a coherent reading of this doctrine can be offered, it will be easier to answer the question of fact, that is, whether things actually are as Aquinas seems to think.

Some other texts may be helpful to complement this section, and to prepare the ground for the following. Right from the beginning, St. Thomas in his treatise presupposes that we know the nature of corporeal things. In the crucial text of 75, 2 c., this is the point of departure for arguing the subsistence of the human soul: "For it is clear that by means of the intellect man can have knowledge of [the natures of] all corporeal things."[174] These natures are perfections of another ("*aliorum*") that are somehow received in the subject[175] through knowledge: "Now whatever knows certain things cannot have any of them in its own nature; because that which is in it naturally would impede the knowledge of anything

[174] 75, 2, c.: "Manifestum est enim quod homo per intellectum cognoscere potest naturas omnium corporum."

[175] Later on, in *Chapter 3*, the receptive character of knowledge will be treated, but it is already suggested in 75, 2. Knowing is a certain *inesse* that would not be possible if the perfection to be known *inesset naturaliter* already.

else…"[176] This fact allows Aquinas to draw the conclusion intended: the human soul does not have the nature of a body, because what is able to receive those natures *in a cognitive way* cannot have that nature *metaphysically* in itself. It is not our purpose here to assess the strength of the Thomistic argument, but to take from this text the following three suggestions.

1) For Aquinas, the nature of a body is a metaphysical property of things, i.e., it belongs metaphysically to them but not to the human soul (the soul is not a body).

2) There is a difference between the cognitive and the metaphysical presence of the nature of a body. In the human soul, the latter is denied whereas the former is admitted (the soul is able to know the nature of all bodies).

3) The human soul is in potency of receiving cognitively the nature of all bodies.

This crucial text of Aquinas, therefore, supports the first side of what we have called the Thomistic fact, namely, that we know the nature of corporeal things.

What we know intellectually is the nature of corporeal things. The nature is outside the mind but not with the same mode of being with which it is known. The nature we understand is universal:

> But there is this difference, according to the opinion of Aristotle, between the sense and the intelligence—that a thing is perceived by the sense according to the disposition which it has outside the soul—that is, in its individuality; whereas the nature of the thing understood is indeed outside the soul, but the mode according

[176] 75, 2, c.: "Quod autem potest cognoscere aliqua, oportet ut nihil eorum habeat in sua natura, quia illud quod inesset ei naturaliter impediret cognitionem aliorum…"

> to which it exists outside the soul is not the mode according to which it is understood.[177]

What we understand is not the intelligible species, but the thing itself through its likeness. The species is the form through which the action of knowing is performed. A few lines before the previous text, St. Thomas says:

> For what is understood is in the intellect, not according to its own nature, but according to its likeness; for 'the stone is not in the soul, but its likeness is,' as is said, De Anima iii, 8. Yet it is the stone which is understood, not the likeness of the stone; except by a reflection of the intellect on itself: otherwise, the objects of sciences would not be things, but only intelligible species.[178]

This latter remark clarifies the meaning of what we call the Thomistic fact: to know the nature of corporeal things means to know something that belongs to the things themselves, not something that pertains to the subject. The Thomistic *species* is a subjective modification through which the intellect has *direct* contact with the thing, not with itself.[179] This idea is repeated in one of the most relevant articles for Thomistic Gnoseology:

> Therefore if what we understand is merely the intelligible species in the soul, it would follow that every science would not be concerned with objects outside the soul, but only with the intelligible species within the soul; thus, according to the teaching of the Platonists all science is about ideas, which they held to be actually understood.[180]

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[177] 76, 2 ad 4: "Sed hoc tantum interest inter sensum et intellectum, secundum sententiam Aristotelis, quod res sentitur secundum illam dispositionem quam extra animam habet, in sua particularitate, *natura autem rei quae intelligitur*, est quidem extra animam, sed non habet illum modum essendi extra animam, secundum quem intelligitur." The object of understanding as the universal nature, and not the thing *in its particularity*, will be the focus of the next section.

[178] 76, 2 ad 4: "Id enim quod intelligitur non est in intellectu secundum se, sed secundum suam similitudinem, *lapis enim non est in anima, sed species lapidis*, ut dicitur in *III De Anima*. Et tamen lapis est id quod intelligitur, non autem species lapidis, nisi per reflexionem intellectus supra seipsum, alioquin scientiae non essent de rebus, sed de speciebus intelligibilibus."

[179] Cf. *In IV Sent*., d. 49, q. 2, a.1 ad 16; *De Ver* 2, 3, ad 3.

[180] 85, 2, c.: "Si igitur ea quae intelligimus essent solum species quae sunt in anima, sequeretur quod scientiae omnes non essent de rebus quae sunt extra animam, sed solum de

The mention of Plato reminds us of the first text examined[181] and is important for our purposes. To say that the subjective modification as such (the *species*) is the object of human understanding is as mistaken as to say, with Plato, that the separate ideas are the object of understanding. In both cases, in fact, human understanding would not refer to the real things, which are the sensible corporeal things. And in both cases, the mistake according to St. Thomas is the same. That is, it is a mistake to think that the object of human understanding needs to be separated from matter in its own (real) being or, in other words, to think that there is nothing intelligible in the particular, that there is nothing universal subsisting in the matter. As we shall see, St. Thomas would blame Kant for the same mistake. The need of the agent intellect arises because the *mode of being* of what we know is not intelligible in act, not because there is nothing intelligible in corporeal things.[182]

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speciebus intelligibilibus quae sunt in anima; sicut secundum Platonicos omnes scientiae sunt de ideis, quas ponebant esse intellecta in actu."

[181] 79, 3.

[182] Cf. *In I De Anima* 4, 106-111: "Plato took the objects known by the intellect to be things in themselves, existing apart from matter in perpetual actuality, and the causes of knowledge and of being in things of sense. For Aristotle this view involved so many difficulties that he was compelled to excogitate the theory of the 'agent intellect'…" [Plato posuit, quod intelligibilia essent per se subsistencia et separata et essent semper in actu, et essent causa cognitionis et esse rebus sensibilibus (quod Aristotiles tamquam inconveniens volens evitare, coactus est ponere intellectum agentem)…]; *In III De Anima* 6, 297-305: "And the mind in act is its object in every way; for (as an object includes matter in its notion or does not include it, in the same way this object is perceived by the intellect). And just because Plato overlooked this process of abstraction he was forced to conceive of mathematical objects and specific natures as existing in separation from matter; whereas Aristotle was able to explain that process by the agent intellect." [Et omnino intellectus in actu est res intellecta, quia sicut res in sui ratione habent materiam vel non habent, sic ab intellectu percipiuntur. Et quia hunc modum abstractionis Plato non consideravit, coactus fuit ponere mathematica et species separatas, loco cuius ad praedictam abstractionem faciendam Aristoteles posuit intellectum agentem.]; *Q.D. De Anima*, a.4, c..

In 79, 3 ad 3, Aquinas says that the intelligible in act does not exist in reality as such, regarding the nature of sensible things: "Now the intelligible in act is not something existing in nature; if we consider the nature of things sensible, which do not subsist apart from matter."[183] Still, the natures of sensible things, which are the object of intelligence, are distinguished from the matter in which they subsist (as is implied in the *corpus*).[184] There is a perfection, namely the nature of corporeal things, which cannot subsist without matter, but is not confounded with the matter itself. St. Thomas also distinguishes these natures from other natures that do not need matter to subsist and, because of that, are intelligible in act (this is the meaning of the clarification, "*quantum ad naturam rerum sensibilium*"). The fact that the object of human intelligence is not in reality intelligible in act brings St. Thomas, not to find the origin of the intelligible content outside reality and in the subject (like Kant), but to find in the subject a capacity of abstracting the intelligible content (the nature) from its individual conditions in the matter, thus making the intelligible in act (the species *representing* this intellectual content).[185] That is why St. Thomas concludes the previous text with the following: "And therefore in order to understand them, the immaterial nature of the passive intellect would not suffice but for the presence of the

[183] 79, 3 ad 3: "Intelligibile autem in actu non est aliquid existens in rerum natura, quantum ad naturam rerum sensibilium, quae non subsistunt praeter materiam."

[184] Cf. 79, 3, c.: "But since Aristotle did not allow that forms of natural things exist apart from matter, and as forms existing in matter are not actually intelligible; it follows that the natures of forms of the sensible things which we understand are not actually intelligible." [Sed quia Aristoteles non posuit formas rerum naturalium subsistere sine materia; formae autem in materia existentes non sunt intelligibiles actu, sequebatur quod naturae seu formae rerum sensibilium, quas intelligimus, non essent intelligibiles actu.]

[185] The distinction between the two meanings of "intelligibilis" and "universalis" (as intellectual content and as mode of being of the content), which is a crucial element of our interpretation of St. Thomas, will be the focus of *Chapter* 2.

active intellect which makes things actually intelligible by way of abstraction."[186] What Aquinas means is that, in order for intelligence to receive the intelligible in act, it is not enough to be itself immaterial (as the objection proposes), but what is also necessary is an intelligible in act which could be received. It is the function of the agent intellect to produce this intelligible in act, for the reasons exposed and in the sense explained.

Our immediate purpose was to situate the role of the agent intellect as the explanation of the Thomistic fact. Given that we know the natures of corporeal things, but these natures do not subsist in the corporeal things in a way that we can take hold of them, there needs to be an agent intellect that makes those natures available to the possible intellect, by making them intelligible in act.[187] The natures of corporeal things are intelligible only in potency (because they are imbedded in matter); our intelligence is also in potency of understanding (because it is *tabula rasa*); in order to understand, we need those natures to be intelligible in act. This is precisely the function of the agent intellect: to make the nature of corporeal things intelligible in act, by means of an abstraction from matter. In this way, those natures will be able to actualize the possible intellect.[188]

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[186] 79, 3 ad 3: "Et ideo ad intelligendum non sufficeret immaterialitas intellectus possibilis, nisi adesset intellectus agens, qui faceret intelligibilia in actu *per modum abstractionis*."

[187] A similar interpretation of the Thomistic fact can be found in Martínez Millán, 55-56: "As Aquinas notes in De Anima, Aristotle wanted to overcome the negative effects of Platonic philosophy, which had reduced sensible things to nothing more tan shadows, objects of opinion but not of knowledge […]. Aristotle […] had postulated the agent intellect in order to save the sensible world from the unknowable"; and Serequeberhan, 42-43: "Aquinas derives the agent intellect from the fact that human beings actually engage in the process of abstraction […] the forms of material things […] do not exist as distinct entities, but inhere in matter. [Human intellect understands] by penetrating the natures or forms of sensible things."

[188] Cf. *In III De Anima* 4, 54-63: "The reason why Aristotle came to postulate an agent intellect was his rejection of Plato's theory that the essences of sensible things existed apart from matter, in a state of actual intelligibility; [hence,] for Plato there was no need to posit an agent

2) The Object of Intelligence in its Formal Aspect: The Universal as Different from the Particular

The purpose of the following sections of this *Chapter* is to clarify the Thomistic fact. The present section intends to show how, for St. Thomas, the object of intelligence is not the material of sensibility, nor the particular as such, but the *universal* as nature of the corporeal thing.

As we have seen, the need of an agent intellect comes from the fact that the object of intelligence is not intelligible in act in reality. The object of intelligence, for St. Thomas, is the universal as the nature of corporeal things. The metaphysical framework of this assertion is the following: the universal, "the one that is said of the many," is in the first place the nature that *is predicated* of many individuals of the same species, because it *subsists* in all of them. Therefore the universal as such is distinguished from the particular individual as a certain "part" from the whole.[189] The nature is the principle by which the individual is *what* it is (specifically); but in order to be *this* individual another principle is required, namely the matter. Because matter is that which differentiates individuals, and

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intellect. But Aristotle, who regarded the essences of sensible things as existing in matter [and not intelligible in act], had to invoke some abstractive principle in the mind itself to render these essences actually intelligible." [Inducitur autem Aristoteles ad ponendum intellectum agentem, ad excludendum opinionem Platonis, qui posuit quidditates rerum sensibilium esse a materia separatas, et intelligibiles actu; unde non erat ei necessarium ponere intellectum agentem. Sed quia Aristoteles ponit, quod *quidditates rerum sensibilium sunt in materia, et non intelligibiles actu*, oportuit quod poneret aliquem intellectum qui abstraheret a materia, et sic faceret eas intelligibiles actu.]

[189] The nature as the specific perfection of each individual can be considered a part of the whole that is this individual. But the individual itself can also be considered part of the other "whole" which is the species as the group of those who participate in a common specific perfection.

the nature instead is that which unites them, nature and principle of individuation are distinct in the individual.[190] For St. Thomas, the nature is the direct object of human understanding.

There is no question that, for St. Thomas, this is the object of intelligence: "But since Aristotle did not allow that forms of natural things exist apart from matter, and as forms existing in matter are not actually intelligible; it follows that the natures of forms of the sensible things which we understand are not actually intelligible."[191] He is not shy of repeating it *multoties*: "The first object of our knowledge in this life is the 'quiddity of a material thing,' which is the proper object of our intellect, as appears above in many passages."[192]

> The human intellect does not acquire perfect knowledge by the first act of apprehension; but it first apprehends something about its object, such as its quiddity, and this is its first and proper object; and then it understands the properties, accidents, and the various relations of the essence. Thus it necessarily compares one thing with another by composition or division…[193]

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[190] With these affirmations I do not claim to have demonstrated the Thomistic metaphysical framework. I mean to offer it as a helpful interpretative key that makes sense of Aquinas' texts.

[191] 79, 3, c.: "Sed quia Aristoteles non posuit formas rerum naturalium subsistere sine materia; formae autem in materia existentes non sunt intelligibiles actu, sequebatur quod naturae seu formae rerum sensibilium, quas intelligimus, non essent intelligibiles actu."

[192] 88, 3, c.: "Primum autem quod intelligitur a nobis secundum statum praesentis vitae, est quidditas rei materialis, quae est nostri intellectus obiectum, ut multoties supra dictum est."; cf. 84, 7; 85, 8; 87, 2 ad 2.

[193] 85, 5, c.: "Intellectus humanus non statim in prima apprehensione capit perfectam rei cognitionem; sed primo apprehendit aliquid de ipsa, puta quidditatem ipsius rei, quae est primum et proprium obiectum intellectus; et deinde intelligit proprietates et accidentia et habitudines circumstantes rei essentiam. Et secundum hoc, necesse habet unum apprehensum alii componere vel dividere…"

"Our intellect's proper and proportionate object is the nature of a sensible thing."[194] "And there is yet another, namely, the human intellect, which neither is its own act of understanding, nor is its own essence the first object of its act of understanding, for this object is [something extrinsic, that is,] the nature of a material thing. And therefore that which is first known by the human intellect is an object of this kind…"[195]

This intellectual object is clearly distinguished from the object of sensibility. Both intelligence and sensitivity are apprehensive, but as different species of the same genus: "Indeed, the passive power itself has its very nature from its relation to its active principle. Therefore, since what is apprehended by the intellect and what is apprehended by sense

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[194] 84, 8, c.: "Proprium obiectum intellectui nostro proportionatum est natura rei sensibilis." That the natures of corporeal things can be intelligible objects can be taken also from *CG II*, 99, par. 1-2: "Thus, through the intelligible forms in question a separate substance knows not only other separate substances, but also the species of corporeal things. For their intellect, being wholly in act, is perfect in point of natural perfection, and, therefore, it must comprehend its object—intelligible being—in a universal manner. Now, *the species of corporeal things are also included within intelligible being*, and the separate substance, therefore, knows them." [Per dictas igitur formas intelligibiles substantia separata non solum cognoscit alias substantias separatas, sed etiam species rerum corporalium. Cum enim intellectus earum sit perfectus naturali perfectione, utpote totus in actu existens, oportet quod suum obiectum, scilicet ens intelligibile, universaliter comprehendat. *Sub ente autem intelligibili comprehenduntur etiam species rerum corporalium*. Eas igitur substantia separata cognoscit.]

[195] 87, 3, c.: "Est autem alius intellectus, scilicet humanus, qui nec est suum intelligere, nec sui intelligere est obiectum primum ipsa eius essentia, sed aliquid extrinsecum, scilicet natura materialis rei. Et ideo id quod primo cognoscitur ab intellectu humano, est huiusmodi obiectum …" It is not our concern to focus on the various words that Aquinas uses, *natura, forma* or *quidditas.* It could be granted that St. Thomas is always speaking of the formal universal principle of a material individual thing (cf. *In Met.* 8, lect. 3, 1710, text on p. 100). Berger also says that according to St. Thomas, the human intellect posseses a proper object: the natures or quiddities present in coporal matter (cf. André de Deus Berger, "A condição do homem no estado da vida presente como determinante para a teoría do conhecimento tomasiana: Suma de Teologia Iª, 84," *Kínesis: Revista De Estudos Dos Pós-Graduandos Em Filosofia* 2, no. 3 [2010]: 35); cf. Richard T. Lambert, "A Textual Study of Aquinas' Comparison of the Intellect to Prime Matter," *New Scholasticism* 56 (1982): 87, "Matter receives its forms by contracting them, to individuality, while forms are in the mind as universals [and he quotes *De Spir. Creat.*, 1]." Cf. Stump, 270.

are generically different; consequently, the intellectual appetite is distinct from the sensitive."[196] In the next two texts it is clear also that both objects, being different, are nevertheless extrinsic, "out there":[197]

> There is another genus in the powers of the soul, which genus regards a more universal object—namely, every sensible body, not only the body to which the soul is united. And there is yet another genus in the powers of the soul, which genus regards a still more universal object—namely, not only the sensible body, but all being in universal. Wherefore it is evident that the latter two genera of the soul's powers have an operation in regard not merely to that which is united to them, but also to something extrinsic.[198]
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> It follows of necessity that this something extrinsic, which is the object of the soul's operation, must be related to the soul in a twofold manner. First, inasmuch as this something extrinsic has a natural aptitude to be united to the soul, and to be by its likeness in the soul. In this way there are two kinds of powers —namely, the "sensitive" in regard to the less common object—the sensible body; and the "intellectual," in regard to the most common object—universal being. Secondly, forasmuch as the soul itself has an inclination and tendency to the something extrinsic.[199]

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[196] 80, 2, c.: "… [I]psa potentia passiva propriam rationem habet ex ordine ad suum activum. Quia igitur est alterius generis apprehensum per intellectum et apprehensum per sensum, consequens est quod appetitus intellectivus sit alia potentia a sensitiva."

[197] The precise meaning of "extrinsic," "out there," "outside the mind," "in re," etc., will hopefully become clear in the following section and chapters. It is to be noted, for now, that it is Aquinas who says that the object is "*extra animam*." It means that the content of our knowing is out there, even if it is not out there with the mode of being it has in our faculty. In that sense, the object is out there *in act* (it *is* there) although it is not *there* in its cognitive mode of being. Other nuances, the relevant texts, etc., will be offered later. Cf. our study of *CG II*, 77 par. 2, at the end of *Chapter 4*; *Summa* I, 79, 4 ad 4; *In Boet. De Trin*. 5, 3, c. (quoted on p. 90) and *In Met.* 8, lect. 1, 1687 (see *Appendix*, Note 5).

[198] 78, 1, c.: "Est autem aliud genus potentiarum animae, quod respicit universalius obiectum, scilicet omne corpus sensibile; et non solum corpus animae unitum. Est autem aliud genus potentiarum animae, quod respicit adhuc universalius obiectum, scilicet non solum corpus sensibile, sed universaliter omne ens. Ex quo patet quod ista duo secunda genera potentiarum animae habent operationem non solum respectu rei coniunctae, sed etiam respectu rei extrinsecae."

[199] 78, 1, c.: "Necesse est extrinsecam rem, quae est obiectum operationis animae, secundum duplicem rationem ad animam comparari. Uno modo, secundum quod nata est animae coniungi et in anima esse per suam similitudinem. Et quantum ad hoc, sunt duo genera potentiarum, scilicet sensitivum, respectu obiecti minus communis, quod est corpus sensibile; et intellectivum,

Because the object of intelligence is not the same as the object of sensitivity, and because both faculties are apprehensive, "… the phantasms cannot of themselves affect the passive intellect, and require to be made actually intelligible by the active intellect…"[200] "Sensitive knowledge is not the entire cause of intellectual knowledge. And therefore it is not strange that intellectual knowledge should extend further than sensitive knowledge."[201] "Further than sensitive" etc. means that what is understood is an object formally different from the object of sensitivity. The object which perfects human intelligence is not the phantasm (*phantasmata non sufficiunt*), but the intelligible in act.[202] More about this crucial text will have to be said later.[203]

There is, however, a series of texts that seems to challenge the main point of this section, that is, that the object of intelligence is the universal nature. Referring to Aristotle's

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respectu obiecti communissimi, quod est ens universale. Alio vero modo, secundum quod ipsa anima inclinatur et tendit in rem exteriorem."

[200] 84, 6, c.: "Sed quia phantasmata non sufficiunt immutare intellectum possibilem, sed oportet quod fiant intelligibilia actu per intellectum agentem…"

[201] 84, 6 ad 3: "Sensitiva cognitio non est tota causa intellectualis cognitionis. Et ideo non est mirum *si* intellectualis cognitio ultra sensitivam se extendit."

[202] Cf. *In III De Anima* 7, 105-113: "[Aristotle] distinguishes between intellect and imagination [first, regarding the second operation, and then he shows] how the primary intellectual notions, the understanding of indivisible objects, differ from phantasms; and he replies that while these are always attended by phantasms, they differ from phantasms; [because phantasms are representations of particulars, whereas the things understood are universal, abstracted from individuating conditions…]" [… ostendit differenciam inter fantasia et intellectum (…) in quo differant primi intellectus, idest intelligentiae indivisibilium, quod non sint phantasmata. Et respondet, quod non sunt sine phantasmatibus, sed tamen non sunt phantasmata, quia phantasmata sunt similitudines particularium, intellecta autem sunt universalia ab individuantibus condicionibus abstracta…]

[203] Cf. *Chapter 4*, section 1. It could be argued that the agent intellect makes the phantasm *itself* intelligible in act, in which case *the phantasm* would be the object perfecting the possible intellect, and the agent intellect would take the role of a formal a priori. However, it will be shown later that, *if taken in context*, the pertinent text of Aquinas cannot produce this conclusion.

III De Anima, St. Thomas affirms that "… the phantasm is to the intellect what color is to the sight."[204] It would seem that, if colour is the object of vision, then the phantasm of sensitivity is the object of intelligence.[205] To begin with, these texts will be examined in their respective contexts and then other references will be used to complete the vision being presented.

In 75, 2, St. Thomas is demonstrating the subsistence of the intellectual principle. In order to do that, he shows that it has an operation in which the body does not participate. Therefore, because *operare sequitur esse*, the intellectual principle does not need the body to subsist, but subsists in itself. To say that the body does not participate in the activity of understanding means that the body is not the faculty nor the instrument of understanding. It does not mean that a body cannot be the object of understanding (here the phantasm comes into play). What does object mean here? This is the point of confusion. St. Thomas says in the *Ad Tertium*:

> The body is necessary for the action of the intellect, not as its origin of action, but on the part of the object; for the phantasm is to the intellect what color is to the sight. Neither does such a dependence on the body prove the intellect to be non-subsistent; otherwise it would follow that an animal is non-subsistent, since it requires external objects of the senses in order to perform its act of perception.[206]

It must be noted that *ratione obiecti* does not necessarily mean *sicut obiectum formale*. The following comparison with the subsistence of animals may be enlightening: an

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[204] 75, 2 ad 3: "… [P]hantasma enim comparatur ad intellectum sicut color ad visum." Cf. 76, 1, c.; 54, 4 sc; as an objection in 85, 1 ob. 3; *In I De Anima* 2, 60-69.

[205] This seems to be Cory's interpretation. See *Appendix*, Note 2.

[206] 75, 2 ad 3: "Dicendum quod corpus requiritur ad actionem intellectus, non sicut organum quo talis actio exerceatur, sed *ratione obiecti*, phantasma enim comparatur ad intellectum sicut color ad visum. Sic autem indigere corpore non removet intellectum esse subsistentem, alioquin animal non esset aliquid subsistens, cum indigeat exterioribus sensibilibus ad sentiendum."

animal subsists in itself even if it needs *exterioribus sensibilibus* in order to know. *Color ad visum*, therefore, means the colour in the thing itself, not in the faculty as perfective of it. In the same way, the phantasm is needed as the bodily representation of the external thing, not as an image perfecting the faculty itself. *Ratione obiecti* means, therefore, that the phantasm is like a material object for the intelligence,[207] insofar as it is required in order to have something to understand.[208] St. Thomas' point in the *Ad Tertium* is this: the need of a body to perform an action would imply the non-subsistence of the soul only if the body were needed as an instrument of the action; but, because the body is needed only as a material object of this action, the argument does not conclude.[209] St. Thomas is not stating

[207] The sense in which Aquinas speaks about object can be illuminated with *In Boet. De Trin.* 6, 2, ad 5: "The phantasm is principle of human knowing, as that from which the intellectual operation begins: not though as something temporary, but as a certain permanent ground of the intellectual operation, in the way the principles of demonstration must remain in the process of science; the phantasms, in fact, are related to the intellect as objects, in which the intellect sees everything, either by perfect representation or by negation." (my trans.) [… *phantasma* est principium nostrae cognitionis, ut *ex quo incipit* intellectus operatio non sicut transiens, sed sicut *permanens ut quoddam fundamentum* intellectualis operationis; sicut principia demonstrationis oportet manere in omni processu scientiae, cum phantasmata comparentur ad intellectum ut *obiecta, in quibus* inspicit omne *quod* inspicit vel secundum perfectam repraesentationem vel per negationem.] "*In quibus"* is referred to the material objectivity of the phantasm, "*quod*" to the formal objectivity of the universal.

[208] For Aquinas, it seems, the colours and the phantasms have the same relationship to vision and intelligence insofar as they stand for the object in its real being. It could be objected that the phantasm is just an image, but for Aquinas the phantasm is an image precisely insofar as it represents the real content. What we understand is what is represented in the phantasm, i.e., the real thing.

[209] The first mention of this Aristotelian text in *In De Anima* can be helpful here. It is *In I De Anima* 2, 60-69: "… [F]or understanding is not accomplished with a bodily organ, though it does bear on a bodily object; because, as will be shown later, in Book III, the phantasms in the imagination are to the intellect as colours to sight: as colours [are the objects of sight, so phantasms are the objects of the intellect…]" [… intelligere enim non est per organum corporale, sed indiget *obiecto corporali*. Sicut enim Philosophus dicit in tertio huius, hoc modo phantasmata se habent ad intellectum, sicut colores ad visum. Colores autem se habent ad visum, sicut obiecta: phantasmata ergo se habent ad intellectum sicut obiecta…] Cf. also *In III De Anima* 6, 130-134: "… [I]f intellect is related to phantasms as the senses to their object, then just as the senses cannot sense without an object, so

that the formal object of intelligence is the phantasm, or that the phantasm perfects the intelligence as the colour (= *species coloris*) perfects the vision.

The text of 76, 1, c. is even clearer. The article is about the kind of union between the soul and the body. After discarding the possibility that man is only his soul, St. Thomas says: "It follows therefore that the intellect by which Socrates understands is a part of Socrates, so that in some way it is united to the body of Socrates."[210] He then examines Averroes' solution:

> The Commentator held that this union is through the intelligible species, as having a double subject, in the possible intellect, and in the phantasms which are in the corporeal organs.[211] Thus through the intelligible species the possible intellect is linked to the body of this or that particular man.[212]

Remember that for Averroes the possible intellect is one for all human beings. Aquinas rejects Averroes' solution, and our text comes into play here:

> But this link or union does not sufficiently explain the fact, that the act of the intellect is the act of Socrates. This can be clearly seen from comparison with the sensitive faculty, from which Aristotle proceeds to consider things relating to the

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the soul cannot understand without phantasms." [… si phantasmata se habent ad animam intellectivam sicut sensibile ad sensum; sicut sensus non potest sentire sine sensibili, ita anima non potest intelligere sine phantasmate.]

[210] 76, 1, c.: "Relinquitur ergo quod intellectus quo Socrates intelligit, est aliqua pars Socratis ita quod intellectus aliquo modo corpori Socratis uniatur."

[211] In order to clarify in what sense the phantasm is "subjectum" for Averroes, cf. *Q.D. De Anima*, a.2, c.: "Thus an intelligible species has two subjects: one in which it exists with an intelligible mode of existing, and this is the possible intellect: another in which it exists with a real mode of existing, and this subject is the phantasms." [Sic igitur species intelligibilis habet duplex subiectum: unum in quo est secundum esse intelligibile, et hoc est intellectus possibilis; aliud in quod est *secundum esse reale*, et hoc subiectum sunt ipsa phantasmata.]

[212] 76, 1, c.: "Hanc autem unionem Commentator, in *III De Anima*, dicit esse per speciem intelligibilem. Quae quidem habet duplex subiectum, unum scilicet intellectum possibilem; et aliud ipsa phantasmata quae sunt in organis corporeis. Et sic per speciem intelligibilem continuatur intellectus possibilis corpori huius vel illius hominis."

> intellect. For the relation of phantasms to the intellect is like the relation of colors to the sense of sight, as he says De Anima iii.[213]
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> How does Aquinas understand what Aristotle said?
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> Therefore, as the species of colors are in the sight, so are the species of phantasms in the possible intellect. Now it is clear that because the colors, the images of which are in the sight, are on a wall, the action of seeing is not attributed to the wall: for we do not say that the wall sees, but rather that it is seen. Therefore, from the fact that the species of phantasms are in the possible intellect, it does not follow that Socrates, in whom are the phantasms, understands, but that he or his phantasms are understood.[214]

What needs to be understood is the meaning of the words here. *Phantasmata* are the phantasms subsisting in the organs of sensitivity, as *colores* are the colours subsisting in the bodies (*in pariete*). *Species colorum* are the objective representations of the colours in the faculty of vision, as *species phantasmatum* are the objective *intelligible* representations of the phantasms in the possible intellect. That is why, as the wall does not see just because it possesses the colour, one does not understand just because one possesses the phantasms. The vision sees insofar as it possesses the *species coloris*, and the possible intellect understands insofar as it possesses the *species intelligibilis*, here *species phantasmatum* (in the sense of species *referring to* the phantasms).[215] St. Thomas is not

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[213] 76, 1, c.: "Sed ista continuatio vel unio non sufficit ad hoc quod actio intellectus sit actio Socratis. Et hoc patet per similitudinem in sensu, ex quo Aristoteles procedit ad considerandum ea quae sunt intellectus. Sic enim se habent phantasmata ad intellectum, ut dicitur in *III De Anima*, sicut colores ad visum."

[214] 76, 1, c.: "Sicut ergo species colorum sunt in visu, ita species phantasmatum sunt in intellectu possibili. Patet autem quod ex hoc quod colores sunt in pariete, quorum similitudines sunt in visu, actio visus non attribuitur parieti, non enim dicimus quod paries videat, sed magis quod videatur. Ex hoc ergo quod species phantasmatum sunt in intellectu possibili, non sequitur quod Socrates, in quo sunt phantasmata, intelligat; sed quod ipse, vel eius phantasmata intelligantur."

[215] Maybe in this sense can be understood also *In I De Anima* 6, 248-254, where Aquinas says: "… [A]s Aristotle has proved, the intellectual potency is brought into act precisely by means of the [species of sensible things]; so that it is moved by them in this way." [… sicut Aristotiles probat,

saying here that the phantasm is the perfection of intelligence, but precisely the opposite: "Therefore, from the fact that the species of phantasms are in the possible intellect, it does not follow that Socrates, in whom are the phantasms, understands, but that he or his phantasms are understood."[216] Here it is most clear that the *species phantasmatum*, which are in the (separate) possible intellect, are distinct from the phantasms, which are in Socrates. *Species phantasmatum* and *phantasmata*, in this text, are different notions.[217]

The Aristotelian phrase is also used in 85, 1 ob. 3. The article is asking whether we understand corporeal things by means of abstraction from phantasms:

> The Philosopher says (De Anima iii, 7) that the phantasm is to the intellectual soul what color is to the sight. But seeing is not caused by abstraction of species from color, but by color impressing itself on the sight. Therefore neither does the act of understanding take place by abstraction of something from the phantasm, but by the phantasm impressing itself on the intellect.[218]

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intellectus possibilis reducitur per ipsa, scilicet per *species rerum sensibilium*, in actum et ideo oportet quod moveatur ab eis hoc modo.] It could be that he is referring instead to the phantasm in the aforementioned sense, as material object. The context is the opposition to Plato regarding the role of sensible things in intellectual knowing.

[216] 76, 1, c.: "Ex hoc ergo quod species phantasmatum sunt in intellectu possibili, non sequitur quod Socrates, in quo sunt phantasmata, intelligat; sed quod ipse, vel eius phantasmata intelligantur."

[217] The parallel in the *In III De Anima* 1, 342-352 is worth quoting: "[The object of which the species present in the knowing faculty is a representation, does not thereby become knower, but rather known.] If the eye contains a likeness of a coloured wall, this does not cause the colour to see, but, on the contrary, to be seen. Therefore if the intelligible idea in the intellect is a sort of likeness of our phantasms, it does not follow that we perceive anything intellectually, but rather that we--or more precisely our phantasms--are understood by that separated intellectual substance." [Id enim cuius similitudo est species, in virtute aliqua cognoscitiva existens, non ex hoc fit cognoscens, sed cognitum. Non enim per hoc quod species quae est in pupilla, est similitudo coloris qui est in pariete, color est videns, sed magis est visus. Per hoc igitur quod *species intelligibilis, quae est in intellectu possibili, est similitudo quaedam phantasmatum*, non sequitur quod nos sumus intelligentes, sed quod nos, vel potius phantasmata nostra sint intellecta ab illa substantia separate.]

[218] 85, 1 ob. 3: "In *III De Anima* dicitur quod phantasmata se habent ad animam intellectivam sicut colores ad visum. Sed visio non fit per abstractionem aliquarum specierum a coloribus, sed per

In other words, what would perfect the intellect is the phantasm, and not an alleged species abstracted from it. Aquinas' response is in line with 76, 1 c., by taking *colores* and *phantasmata* as the objects in their particular material being, distinct from their respective *species* or *similitudines*: "Colors, as being in individual corporeal matter, have the same mode of existence as the power of sight: therefore they can impress their own image on the eye."[219] Note Aquinas' precision regarding the objection: what is impressed in vision is the *similitudinem* (species) of the colours, and not the colours in their real being, *prout sunt in materia corporali individuali*, as the objection could have suggested (ob. 3: "*visio non fit per abstractionem aliquarum specierum a coloribus, sed per hoc quod colores imprimunt in visum*"). Now, *eundem modum existendi* means here that both the potency of vision and the colour in reality are particular and individual. This same mode of being allows the colours to impress the potency of vision by means of their species. But this does not apply to the phantasms regarding the potency of understanding: "But phantasms, since they are images of individuals, and exist in corporeal organs, have not the same mode of existence as the human intellect, and therefore have not the power of themselves to make an impression on the passive intellect."[220] The phantasm is not that which perfects the potency of understanding. What is it, then? "This is done by the power of the active intellect which

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hoc quod colores imprimunt in visum. Ergo nec intelligere contingit per hoc quod aliquid abstrahatur a phantasmatibus, sed per hoc quod phantasmata imprimunt in intellectum."

[219] 85, 1 ad 3: "Ad tertium dicendum quod colores habent eundem modum existendi prout sunt in materia corporali individuali, sicut et potentia visiva, et ideo possunt imprimere suam similitudinem in visum."

[220] 85, 1 ad 3: "Sed phantasmata, cum sint similitudines individuorum, et existant in organis corporeis, non habent eundem modum existendi quem habet intellectus humanus, ut ex dictis patet; et ideo non possunt sua virtute imprimere in intellectum possibilem."

by turning towards the phantasm produces in the passive intellect a certain likeness which represents, as to its specific conditions only, the thing reflected in the phantasm."[221] Here it seems clear that the phantasm (as sensible species) and the intellectual species are two different things, one representing the particular as such and the other representing the *same thing* (what else if not?) but only in its nature, in its universal content. There are two different species with two different contents, because there are two different faculties and two formally different objects: particular and universal.[222]

The last text to be presented is actually outside the section of the *Summa* being studied, but it may be helpful:

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[221] 85, 1 ad 3: "Sed virtute intellectus agentis resultat quaedam similitudo in intellectu possibili ex conversione intellectus agentis supra phantasmata, quae quidem est repraesentativa eorum quorum sunt phantasmata, solum quantum ad naturam speciei." Cf. *Q.D. De Anima*, a.3, ad 18: "A phantasm moves the intellect [insofar as it is made intelligible in act] by the power of the agent intellect, to which the possible intellect is related as potency is to [its respective active power]. This is the way in which the intellect has something in common with a phantasm." [Phantasma movet intellectum prout est factum intelligibile actu, virtute intellectus agentis ad quam comparatur intellectus possibilis sicut potentia ad agens, et ita cum eo communicat.]; *Q.D. De Anima*, a.3, c.: "For species are actually intelligible only by being abstracted from phantasms and by existing in the possible intellect." [Species enim non sunt intelligibiles actu nisi per hoc quod a phantasmatibus abstrahuntur, et sunt in intellectu possibili.]; *Q.D. De Anima*, a.2, ob. 7: "Inasmuch as intelligible forms inhere in the soul, they are individuated; but as the likenesses of things, they are [universal], representing things according to their common nature and not according to their individuating principles." [Formae intelligibiles ex illa parte qua inhaerent animae, sunt individuatae; sed ex illa parte qua sunt rerum similitudines, sunt universales, repraesentantes res secundum naturam communem, et non secundum principia individuantia.]

[222] Cf. *De Spirit. Creat*., a.10, ad 17: "A species which is in the imagination is of the same genus as a species which is in a sense, because both are individual and material. But a species which is in an intellect belongs to another genus, because it is universal. And consequently an imagined species cannot imprint an intelligible species as a sensitive species imprints an imagined species; and for this reason an active intellectual power is necessary, whereas an active sense power is not." [Species quae est in imaginatione, est eiusdem generis cum specie quae est in sensu, quia utraque est individualis et materialis; *sed species quae est in intellectu, est alterius generis, quia est universalis*. Et ideo *species imaginaria non potest imprimere speciem intelligibilem*, sicut species sensibilis imprimit speciem imaginariam; propter quod necessaria est virtus intellectiva activa, non autem virtus sensitiva activa.]

> The distinction of active and passive intellect in us is in relation to the phantasms, which are compared to the passive intellect as colors to the sight; but to the active intellect as colors to the light, as is clear from *De Anima iii*. But this is not so in the angel. Therefore there is no active and passive intellect in the angel.[223]

The comparison here goes beyond the possible intellect to include a comparison with the agent intellect. This text reinforces the interpretation previously presented of colours and phantasms as objects in their concrete and real being, and not as already perfecting the faculty. If the comparison with the possible intellect could have left things ambiguous, the comparison with the agent intellect leaves little room for doubt. The colours which are subject to the influence of light are the colours in their real being, *also* before knowledge happens. The phantasm which is compared with the agent intellect represents the particular thing insofar as it is *or can be* illuminated, and then intellectually known. The influence of light is a necessary condition of actual knowing, as making knowable the real object. According to Aquinas, therefore, colour and phantasm in the Aristotelian text stand for the objects in their respective realities, and not for the perfective objects of vision and of possible intellect. The perfective object of the intellect, as has been shown, is a different species representing the same thing as is represented in the phantasm, but only in its nature.[224]

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[223] 54, 4, sc.: "Sed contra est quod in nobis intellectus agens et possibilis est per comparationem ad phantasmata; quae quidem comparantur ad intellectum possibilem ut colores ad visum, ad intellectum autem agentem ut colores ad lumen, ut patet ex *III De Anima*. Sed hoc non est in Angelo. Ergo in Angelo non est intellectus agens et possibilis."

[224] Another text in which this Aristotelian text is quoted is *In Boet. De Trin*. 6, 3, c.: "In the present state of life, our intellect is not able to refer immediately to the Divine essence or other separate substances, since it refers immediately to the phantasms, to which the intellect is compared as sight to colours, as we read in *III De Anima*. In this way, the intellect is able to apprehend immediately only the quiddity of a sensible thing, not the quiddity of an intelligible thing." [Immediate quidem intellectus noster ferri non potest secundum statum viae in essentiam

This solution is consistent with other works of Aquinas, for example in the *Contra Gentiles*:

> Now, the species understood is compared to the phantasm as the actually visible species to the colored thing outside the mind; indeed, Averroes himself uses this comparison, as does Aristotle. Through the intelligible form, therefore, the possible intellect is in touch with the phantasm in us, even as the power of sight is in touch with the color present in the stone. But this contact does not make the stone to see, but only to be seen.[225]

Dei et in alias essentias separatas, quia *immediate extenditur* ad phantasmata, ad quae comparatur sicut visus ad colorem, ut dicitur in *III De Anima*. *Et* sic *immediate* potest concipere intellectus *quiditatem rei sensibilis*, non autem alicuius rei intelligibilis.] Again, that the phantasm is object does not mean that the phantasm is the object *quod*. Compare with *In III De Anima* 2, 178-186: "… [W]e could not make any comparison between the universal and the individual if we had not a faculty which perceived both […]. The intellect therefore knows both […], but in different ways. It knows the specific nature or essence of an object by (reaching) out directly to that object; but it knows the individual thing indirectly or reflexively, by a return to the phantasms from which it abstracted what is intelligible." [… non possemus cognoscere comparationem universalis ad particulare, nisi esset una potentia quae cognosceret utrumque. Intellectus igitur utrumque cognoscit, sed alio et alio modo. Cognoscit enim naturam speciei, sive quod quid est, *directe extendendo* seipsum, ipsum autem singulare per quamdam reflexionem, inquantum redit super phantasmata, a quibus species intelligibiles abstrahuntur.] In this second text, the phantasm is considered *in its singularity*, and that is why it is not the immediate object of intelligence. In my view, in these texts, "immediate" and "direct" could mean the same.

[225] *CG II*, 59, par. 10: "Species autem intellecta comparatur ad phantasma sicut species visibilis in actu ad coloratum quod est extra animam: et hac similitudine ipse [Averroes] utitur, et etiam Aristoteles. Similis igitur continuatio est intellectus possibilis per formam intelligibilem ad phantasma quod in nobis est, et potentiae visivae ad colorem qui est in lapide. Haec autem continuatio non facit lapidem videre, sed solum videri." Cf. also *CG II*, 59, par. 13: "Hence, the species of a thing, as present in phantasms, is not actually intelligible, since in this state it is not one with the intellect in act, but is one with it according as the species is abstracted from the phantasms. Just so, the species of color is not actually perceived [insofar] as it [is] in the stone, but only [insofar] as it [is] in the pupil." [Species igitur rei, secundum quod est in phantasmatibus, non est intelligibilis actu: non enim sic est unum cum intellectu in actu sed secundum quod est a phantasmatibus abstracta; sicut nec species coloris est sensata in actu secundum quod est in lapide, sed solum secundum quod est in pupilla.] Cf. Stump, 257 note 55. The word "species" indicates here something that is both in reality and in knowing, so not *so much* the *similitudo* but rather the content of it. It is one more example showing the freedom with which Aquinas uses the terms.

In other texts St. Thomas says explicitly that the perfecting object of intelligence is not the phantasm.[226] In that which follows, the difference between the species of the senses and of the intellect is also clear. That is, numerically different phantasms refer to only one intelligible species (species = cognitional *similitudo*), because the phantasms, and therefore the things represented, are of the same species (species = nature as metaphysical formal principle).

> But the phantasm itself is not a form of the possible intellect; it is the intelligible species abstracted from the phantasm that is a form. Now in one intellect, from different phantasms of the same species, only one intelligible species is abstracted; as appears in one man, in whom there may be different phantasms of a stone; yet from all of them only one intelligible species of a stone is abstracted; by which the intellect of that one man, by one operation, understands the nature of a stone, notwithstanding the diversity of phantasms.[227]

Our intellect is able to know corporeal things, not by means of corporeal images (phantasms) but by means of intelligible species:

> These words of Augustine are to be understood as referring to the medium of intellectual knowledge, and not to its object. For the intellect knows bodies by understanding them, not indeed through bodies, nor through material and corporeal

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[226] Cf. *Q.D. De Anima*, a.2, c.: "… [A] phantasm is not the subject of an intelligible species inasmuch as [it] is [what is] actually understood. On the contrary, [what is actually understood is made] by abstraction from phantasms. [On the other hand,] the possible intellect is the subject of an intelligible species only inasmuch as an intelligible species is already actually understood and abstracted from phantasms." [… phantasma non est subiectum speciei intelligibilis secundum quod est intellectum in actu, sed magis per abstractionem a phantasmatibus fit intellectum in actu. Intellectus autem possibilis non est subiectum speciei intelligibilis, nisi secundum quod est intellecta iam in actu, et abstracta a phantasmatibus.] The context is also the polemic with Averroes.

[227] 76, 2, c.: "Sed ipsum phantasma non est forma intellectus possibilis, sed species intelligibilis quae a phantasmatibus abstrahitur. In uno autem intellectu a phantasmatibus diversis eiusdem speciei non abstrahitur nisi una species intelligibilis. Sicut in uno homine apparet, in quo possunt esse diversa phantasmata lapidis, et tamen ab omnibus eis abstrahitur una species intelligibilis lapidis, per quam intellectus unius hominis operatione una intelligit naturam lapidis, non obstante diversitate phantasmatum." It should be noted that the context is the important polemic against Averroes' theory of one intellect.

> species; but through immaterial and intelligible species, which can be in the soul by their own essence.[228]

The formal object of intelligence is the nature in its absoluteness, not in its particularity: "But the intellectual soul knows a thing in its nature absolutely: for instance, it knows a stone absolutely as a stone; and therefore the form of a stone absolutely, as to its proper formal idea, is in the intellectual soul."[229] "Now the receptive potentiality in the intellectual soul is other than the receptive potentiality of first matter, as appears from the diversity of the things received by each. For primary matter receives individual forms; whereas the intelligence receives absolute forms."[230]

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[228] 84, 1 ad 1: "Dicendum quod verbum Augustini est intelligendum quantum ad ea quibus intellectus cognoscit, non autem quantum ad ea quae cognoscit. Cognoscit enim corpora intelligendo, sed non per corpora, neque per similitudines materiales et corporeas; sed per species immateriales et intelligibiles, quae per sui essentiam in anima esse possunt." Cf. *De Spirit. Creat.*, a.9, c.: "Nor can it be said that my act of understanding is different from your act of understanding by reason of the diversity of the phantasms; because a phantasm is not a thing that is understood in act, but this latter is something abstracted from it, which is held to be a word. Hence the diversity of the phantasms is extrinsic to intellectual activity, and thus cannot cause differences in it." [Nec potest dici quod intelligere meum sit aliud ab intelligere tuo per diversitatem phantasmatum; quia *phantasma non est intellectum in actu, sed id quod est ab eo abstractum, quod ponitur esse verbum*. Unde diversitas phantasmatum est extrinseca ab intellectuali operatione; et sic non potest diversificare ipsam.]

[229] 75, 5, c.: "Anima autem intellectiva cognoscit rem aliquam in sua natura absolute, puta lapidem inquantum est lapis absolute. Est igitur forma lapidis absolute, secundum propriam rationem formalem, in anima intellectiva."

[230] 75, 5 ad 1: "Est autem alia potentia receptiva in anima intellectiva, a potentia receptiva materiae primae, ut patet ex diversitate receptorum, nam materia prima recipit formas individuales, intellectus autem recipit formas absolutas." Cf. *In III De Anima* 1, 323-329: "Therefore the intelligible idea cannot be the form of the intellectual power until it is actually [intelligible]; and this cannot happen until it is disengaged from phantasms by abstraction. Hence, precisely in the degree that it is joined to the intellect it is removed from phantasms. Not in this way therefore could an intellectual power be united with us." [Species igitur intelligibilis non est forma intellectus possibilis, nisi secundum quod est intelligibilis actu: non est autem intelligibilis actu, nisi secundum quod est a phantasmatibus abstracta et remota. Manifestum est igitur, quod secundum quod unitur intellectui, est remota a phantasmatibus. Non igitur intellectus per hoc unitur nobiscum.] The context is the polemic with Averroes.

Thus it seems clear that, for St. Thomas, the object of intelligence in its formal aspect is different from the object of sensitivity.[231] It is different in its content, and it is known through a different species.[232] Although there have been some anticipations, the subsistence of this object *in reality* as a formal perfection of corporeal things outside the mind will be the focus of the next section. And the characteristic of knowing as receptive, and in this sense similar to sensibility, will be the focus of *Chapter 3*.

[231] Cf. *In Met.* 12, lect. 8, 2540-2541: "Now its proper intelligible object is substance, since the object of the intellect is a quiddity. Hence he says that the intellect is receptive of something intelligible and of substance. […] But it should be borne in mind that material substances are not actually intelligible but only potentially; and they become actually intelligible by reason of the fact that the likenesses of them which are gotten by way of the sensory powers are made immaterial by the agent intellect. And these likenesses are not substances but certain intelligible forms received into the possible intellect. But according to Plato the intelligible forms of material things are self-subsistent entities." [Intelligibile autem proprie est substantia; nam obiectum intellectus est quod quid est; et propter hoc dicit, quod intellectus est susceptivus intelligibilis et substantiae. (…) Sed sciendum est quod substantiae materiales non sunt intelligibiles actu, sed potentia; *fiunt autem intelligibiles actu per hoc quod mediantibus virtutibus sensitivis earum similitudines immateriales redduntur per intellectum agentem*. Illae autem similitudines non sunt substantiae, sed quaedam species intelligibiles in intellectu possibili receptae. Sed secundum Platonem, species intelligibiles rerum materialium erant per se subsistentes.] The intelligible species is called "immaterial" and is compared with the Platonic idea, for which it cannot be the phantasm. Cf. Stump, 248 and note 12.

[232] Cf. *Q.D. De Anima*, a.4, ad 5: "… [T]he species existing in the medium and in the sense is a particular and nothing more. The possible intellect, however, receives species of a higher genus than those present in the imagination; because the possible intellect receives universal species, whereas the imagination contains only particular species. Therefore we require an agent intellect in the case of intelligible things…" [… cum species in medio et in sensu non sit nisi particularis. Intellectus autem possibilis recipit species alterius generis quam sint in imaginatione; cum intellectus possibilis recipiat species universales, et imaginatio non contineat nisi particulares. Et ideo in intelligibilibus indigemus intellectu agente…]

3) The Object of Intelligence in its Real Aspect: The Universal is in the Things Themselves.

The purpose of this section is to show that, for St. Thomas, the object of intelligence, which is formally different from the object of sensibility,[233] subsists in the corporeal things.[234] In other words, the universals, as objects of understanding, are in the particular things themselves, neither in a different world of Platonic ideas, nor as coming from or belonging to the subjectivity.

Two sections, already quoted, of 78, 1, c. will help to show that, for St. Thomas, both sensibility and intelligence relate the soul to that which is external to it. This implies that the universal is something extrinsic, something objective as "out there." After speaking about the vegetative potencies of the soul, Aquinas says:

> There is another genus in the powers of the soul, which genus regards a more universal object—namely, every sensible body, not only the body to which the soul is united. And there is yet another genus in the powers of the soul, which genus regards a still more universal object—namely, not only the sensible body, but all being in universal. Wherefore it is evident that the latter two genera of the soul's powers have an operation in regard not merely to that which is united to them, but also to something extrinsic.[235]

[233] Cf. the previous section in this *Chapter*.

[234] Cf. *In I De Anima* 3, 198-203; 8, 125-131.

[235] 78, 1, c.: "Est autem aliud genus potentiarum animae, quod respicit universalius obiectum, scilicet omne corpus sensibile; et non solum corpus animae unitum. Est autem aliud genus potentiarum animae, quod respicit adhuc universalius obiectum, scilicet non solum corpus sensibile, sed universaliter omne ens. Ex quo patet quod ista duo secunda genera potentiarum animae habent operationem non solum respectu rei coniunctae, sed etiam respectu rei extrinsecae."

A few lines later, he stresses that this relationship with the extrinsic thing is verified by means of an image (*similitudo*) and is different from the relationship established by the appetitive faculties:

> It follows of necessity that this something extrinsic, which is the object of the soul's operation, must be related to the soul in a twofold manner. First, inasmuch as this something extrinsic has a natural aptitude to be united to the soul, and to be by its likeness in the soul. In this way there are two kinds of powers —namely, the "sensitive" in regard to the less common object—the sensible body; and the "intellectual," in regard to the most common object—universal being. Secondly, forasmuch as the soul itself has an inclination and tendency to the something extrinsic.[236]

As in the previous text, if there is a difference with sensibility, that difference does not lie in the object of intelligence not being "out there":

> But there is this difference, according to the opinion of Aristotle, between the sense and the intelligence—that a thing is perceived by the sense according to the disposition which it has outside the soul—that is, in its individuality; whereas the nature of the thing understood is indeed outside the soul, but the mode according to which it exists outside the soul is not the mode according to which it is understood.[237]

[236] 78, 1, c.: "Necesse est extrinsecam rem, quae est obiectum operationis animae, secundum duplicem rationem ad animam comparari. Uno modo, secundum quod nata est animae coniungi et in anima esse per suam similitudinem. Et quantum ad hoc, sunt duo genera potentiarum, scilicet sensitivum, respectu obiecti minus communis, quod est corpus sensibile; et intellectivum, respectu obiecti communissimi, quod est ens universale. Alio vero modo, secundum quod ipsa anima inclinatur et tendit in rem exteriorem."

[237] 76, 2 ad 4: "Sed hoc tantum interest inter sensum et intellectum, secundum sententiam Aristotelis, quod res sentitur secundum illam dispositionem quam extra animam habet, in sua particularitate, natura autem rei quae intelligitur, est quidem extra animam, sed non habet illum modum essendi extra animam, secundum quem intelligitur."

This is the meaning of realism for St. Thomas: if the things we know by our intellectual faculty were not out there,[238] our knowing would not refer to the things themselves. Immediately preceeding the quotation above, Aquinas says:

> For what is understood is in the intellect, not according to its own nature, but according to its likeness; for 'the stone is not in the soul, but its likeness is,' as is said, De Anima iii, 8. Yet it is the stone which is understood, not the likeness of the stone; except by a reflection of the intellect on itself: otherwise, the objects of sciences would not be things, but only intelligible species.[239]

A similar remark occurs in 85, 2, c., where it is clear that "out there" for St. Thomas does not mean outside the world of corporeal things:

> Therefore if what we understand is merely the intelligible species in the soul, it would follow that every science would not be concerned with objects outside the soul, but only with the intelligible species within the soul; thus, according to the teaching of the Platonists all science is about ideas, which they held to be actually understood.[240]

What we know by means of the intelligible species are the natures of corporeal things, and that is why we need *conversio ad phantasmata*: "We need further to make use of them [*i.e.* 'species preserved in the passive intellect'] in a manner befitting the things of which they are the species, which things are natures existing in individuals."[241]

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[238] It is not possible to treat thoroughly the mediation of the phantasm in intellectual knowing, but certain principles may orient the reader to understand my position. See *Appendix*, Note 3.

[239] 76, 2 ad 4: "Id enim quod intelligitur non est in intellectu secundum se, sed secundum suam similitudinem, *lapis enim non est in anima, sed species lapidis*, ut dicitur in *III De Anima*. Et tamen lapis est id quod intelligitur, non autem species lapidis, nisi per reflexionem intellectus supra seipsum, alioquin scientiae non essent de rebus, sed de speciebus intelligibilibus."

[240] 85, 2, c.: "Si igitur ea quae intelligimus essent solum species quae sunt in anima, sequeretur quod scientiae omnes non essent de rebus quae sunt extra animam, sed solum de speciebus intelligibilibus quae sunt in anima; sicut secundum Platonicos omnes scientiae sunt de ideis, quas ponebant esse intellecta in actu."

[241] 84, 7 ad 1: "oportet quod eis [i.e. 'species conservatae in intellectu possibili'] utamur secundum quod convenit rebus quarum sunt species, quae sunt naturae in particularibus existentes."

Particularly clear are the statements in 85, 2 ad 2, and it is worth the long quotation. For St. Thomas, the object of knowing and the mode of being of this object in the knower are not the same. What we know is in the thing itself, although not with the same mode of being, and this applies even to the senses:

> In these words 'the thing actually understood' there is a double implication—the thing which is understood, and [its being] understood. In like manner the words 'abstract universal' imply two things, the nature of a thing and its abstraction or universality. Therefore the nature itself to which it occurs to be understood, abstracted or considered as universal is only in individuals; but [its being] understood, abstracted or considered as universal is in the intellect. [We can see the point by a comparison with the senses]. For the sight sees the color of the apple apart from its smell. If therefore it be asked where is the color which is seen apart from the smell, it is quite clear that the color which is seen is only in the apple: but that it be perceived apart from the smell, this is owing to the sight, forasmuch as the faculty of sight receives the likeness of color and not of smell. In like manner humanity understood is only in this or that man; but that humanity be apprehended without conditions of individuality, that is, that it be abstracted and consequently considered as universal, occurs to humanity inasmuch as it is brought under the consideration of the intellect, in which there is a likeness of the specific nature, but not of the principles of individuality.[242]

The object of intelligence in its subsistence in reality is the nature as formal principle of the corporeal thing. Insofar as it is considered in its abstraction, the universal is *principium cognoscendi*; but insofar as it subsists in reality, it is *principium essendi*:

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[242] 85, 2 ad 2: "Cum dicitur intellectum in actu, duo importantur, scilicet res quae intelligitur, et hoc quod est ipsum intelligi. Et similiter cum dicitur universale abstractum, duo intelliguntur, scilicet ipsa natura rei, et abstractio seu universalitas. Ipsa igitur natura cui accidit vel intelligi vel abstrahi, vel intentio universalitatis, non est nisi in singularibus; sed hoc ipsum quod est intelligi vel abstrahi, vel intentio universalitatis, est in intellectu. Et hoc possumus videre per simile in sensu. Visus enim videt colorem pomi sine eius odore. Si ergo quaeratur ubi sit color qui videtur sine odore manifestum est quod color qui videtur, non est nisi in pomo; sed quod sit sine odore perceptus, hoc accidit ei ex parte visus, inquantum in visu est similitudo coloris et non odoris. Similiter humanitas quae intelligitur, non est nisi in hoc vel in illo homine, sed quod humanitas apprehendatur sine individualibus conditionibus, quod est ipsam abstrahi, ad quod sequitur intentio universalitatis, accidit humanitatis secundum quod percipitur ab intellectu, in quo est similitudo naturae speciei, et non individualium principiorum."

> The universal, as understood with the intention of universality, is, indeed, in a way, a principle of knowledge, in so far as the intention of universality results from the mode of understanding by way of abstraction. […] But if we consider the generic or specific nature itself as existing in the singular, thus in a way it is in the nature of a formal principle in regard to the singulars…[243]

In the following text, the word "species" stands for formal principle in reality, and not in the sense of image. There is in reality something that allows us to say that various individuals are not different in their species, but only in number: "The difference of form which is due only to the different disposition of matter, causes not a specific but only a numerical difference: for different individuals have different forms, diversified according to the difference of matter."[244]

As has already been shown in 79, 3, and will yet be shown especially in *Chapter 2*, the fact that the nature of corporeal things is not intelligible in act does not enable one to conclude that the nature is not there with another mode of being. To draw such a

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[243] 85, 3 ad 4: "Universale, secundum quod accipitur cum intentione universalitatis, est quidem quodammodo principium cognoscendi, prout intentio universalitatis consequitur modum intelligendi qui est per abstractionem […] Si autem consideremus ipsam naturam generis et speciei prout est in singularibus, sic quodammodo habet rationem principii formalis respectu singularium…"

[244] 85, 7 ad 3: "Differentia formae quae non provenit nisi ex diversa dispositione materiae, non facit diversitatem secundum speciem, sed solum secundum numerum; sunt enim diversorum individuorum diversae formae, secundum materiam diversificatae." The two meanings of "species" (one real and one gnoseological) can be seen at work in 76, 2, c., in which various phantasms are said to be of the same species: "But the phantasm itself is not a form of the possible intellect; it is the intelligible species abstracted from the phantasm that is a form. Now in one intellect, from different phantasms of the same species, only one intelligible species is abstracted; as appears in one man, in whom there may be different phantasms of a stone; yet from all of them only one intelligible species of a stone is abstracted; by which the intellect of that one man, by one operation, understands the nature of a stone, notwithstanding the diversity of phantasms." [Sed ipsum phantasma non est forma intellectus possibilis, sed species intelligibilis quae a phantasmatibus abstrahitur. In uno autem intellectu a phantasmatibus diversis eiusdem speciei non abstrahitur nisi una species intelligibilis. Sicut in uno homine apparet, in quo possunt esse diversa phantasmata lapidis, et tamen ab omnibus eis abstrahitur una species intelligibilis lapidis, per quam intellectus unius hominis operatione una intelligit naturam lapidis, non obstante diversitate phantasmatum.]

conclusion is precisely Plato's error and—it will be argued—Kant's error also: "Having observed that all knowledge takes place through some kind of similitude, he thought that the form of the thing known must of necessity be in the knower in the same manner as in the thing known. […] Wherefore he concluded that the things which we understand must have in themselves an existence under the same conditions of immateriality and immobility."[245]

For St. Thomas, we may conclude, that which is known by intelligence is the formal principle subsisting in corporeal things, their nature or species, the formal principle of their being, which subsists in composition with the principle of individuation in the thing itself. This same nature, concretely subsistent in the thing, is known in a state of abstraction. The different mode of being does not affect the objectivity of the content.

An examen of other works of Aquinas follows.[246] Because the truth in the intellect depends on the things themselves, there must be something in the things that corresponds to our knowing: "… for our intellectual conceptions are true inasmuch as they actually represent the thing known by a certain process of assimilation. Otherwise they would be false, that is, if they corresponded to nothing."[247] That the universal subsists in the things themselves implies that there is a certain necessity and stability in them:

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[245] 84, 1 c.: "… [C]um aestimaret omnem cognitionem per modum alicuius similitudinis esse, credidit quod forma cogniti ex necessitate sit in cognoscente eo modo quo est in cognito. […] Et ideo existimavit quod oporteret res intellectas hoc modo in seipsis subsistere, scilicet immaterialiter et immobiliter."

[246] I follow, in general, the chronological order offered by Stump, xvi-xx: *De Veritate* (1256-1259), *In Boet. De Trin.* (1257-1258), *Contra Gentiles* (1259-1265), *Q.D. De Anima* (1265-1266), *In De Anima* (1267-1268), *De Spirit. Creat.* (1267-1268), *In Met.* (1270-1273).

[247] *De Ver.* 2, 1, c.: "… [C]onceptio enim intellectus nostri secundum hoc vera est, prout repraesentat per quamdam assimilationem rem intellectam; alias enim falsa esset, si nihil subesset in re."

> The difficulty of this question obliged Plato to postulate his ideas. In fact, because […] he believed that all of sensible things were always in movement […] and therefore he thought it was impossible to have science of them, he postulated certain substances separated from sensible things, which would be the objects of the various sciences and of definitions. But this misconception came from the fact that he did not distinguish that which belongs to something in itself from that which is accidental […]. As it is demonstrated in *VII Metaphysicae*, given that in the sensible substance we find the whole, that is, the composite, and also the *ratio*, that is, its form; we must say that what is generated and corrupted in itself is the composite, not the *ratio* or form, unless by accident. […] Now, anything can be considered without those things that do not belong to it in itself. Thus the forms and *rationes* of things, even subject to movement, are without movement insofar as they are considered in themselves. It is in this way that they are objects of the various sciences and of definitions, as the Philosopher says in the abovementioned place. And the sciences of sensible substances are not based on the knowledge of substances separated from sensible things, as it is also there demonstrated.[248] (my trans.)

The mind's dependence on reality in knowing the abstracted universal is stressed here also:

> The mathematician in abstracting does not consider his object differently than it is. In fact, he does not understand the line as being without sensible matter, but rather he considers the line and its properties without considering sensible matter. In this way, there is no discrepancy between the intellect and the thing because, even with regard to the thing itself, that which belongs to the nature of the line does not depend on that which makes the matter to be sensible, but rather vice versa. Thus it

[248] *In Boet. De Trin.* 5, 2, c.: "Propter difficultatem huius quaestionis coactus est Plato ad ponendum ideas. Cum enim […] crederet omnia sensibilia semper esse in fluxu […] et ita existimaret de eis non posse esse scientiam, posuit quasdam substantias a sensibilibus separatas, de quibus essent scientiae et darentur diffinitiones. Sed hic defectus accidit ex eo quod non distinxit quod est per se ab eo quod est secundum accidens […] Ut autem probatur in *VII Metaphysicae*, cum *in substantia sensibili inveniatur et ipsum integrum, id est compositum, et ratio, id est forma eius,* per se quidem generatur et corrumpitur compositum, non autem ratio sive forma, sed solum per accidens […] Unumquodque autem potest considerari sine omnibus his quae ei non per se comparantur. Et ideo *formae et rationes rerum quamvis in motu exsistentium*, prout in se considerantur, absque motu sunt. Et sic de eis sunt scientiae et diffinitiones, ut ibidem Philosophus dicit. Non autem scientiae sensibilium substantiarum fundantur super cognitione aliquarum substantiarum a sensibilibus separatarum, ut ibidem probatur." This stability in material things is affirmed in other texts as well. Cf. *In Boet. De Trin*. 5, 2, ob. 6 et ad 6 (text in *Appendix*, Note 4); *In I De Anima* 3, 198-205 (text in *Appendix*, Note 4); *De Spirit. Creat.*, a.10, ad 8 (text in *Appendix*, Note 4); *In Met*. 11, lect. 6, 2232.

> is evident that there is no falsity regarding abstraction, as it is said in *II Physicorum*.[249] (my trans.)

The simple apprehension corresponds with the nature as a metaphysical principle in the thing itself:

> … [A]ccording to the Philosopher in *III De Anima*, the intellect has two operations: one that is called intelligence of the indivisible, by which the intellect knows of each thing what it is; the other one, by which the intellect composes and divides […] And these two operations correspond to two things that are in the things themselves. The first operation regards the nature itself of the thing, according to which the thing understood obtains a certain degree in the realm of beings, be it a complete thing, like a certain whole, or an incomplete thing, like a part or an accident. The second operation instead regards the being itself of the thing, which results from the congregation of the thing's principles in composites, or accompanies the thing's simple nature itself, as it happens in simple substances.[250] (my trans.)

The universal as nature is something which is known separately even if it does not exist separately in the thing itself. What is actual in the composite substance allows us to know its nature:

> … [B]y means of the first operation, the intellect is able to abstract those things that are not separate in reality; not, however, all of them, but only some. In fact, since something is intelligible insofar as it is in act, as we read in *IX Metaphysicae*, it is necessary that we understand the thing's nature or quiddity *either* insofar as the nature itself is a certain act, as it happens in simple forms and substances, *or* in that

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[249] *In Boet. De Trin*. 5, 3, ad 1: "Mathematicus abstrahens non considerat rem aliter quam sit. Non enim intelligit lineam esse sine materia sensibili, sed considerat lineam et eius passiones sine consideratione materiae sensibilis, *et sic non est dissonantia inter intellectum et rem, quia etiam secundum rem id, quod est de natura lineae, non dependet ab eo, quod facit materiam esse sensibilem, sed magis e converso*. Et sic patet quod abstrahentium non est mendacium, ut dicitur in *II Physicorum*."

[250] *In Boet. De Trin*. 5, 3, c.: "… [S]ecundum Philosophum in *III De Anima* duplex est operatio intellectus. Una, quae dicitur intelligentia indivisibilium, qua cognoscit de unoquoque, quid est. Alia vero, qua componit et dividit […]. Et *hae quidem duae operationes duobus, quae sunt in rebus, respondent*. Prima quidem operatio respicit ipsam naturam rei, secundum quam res intellecta aliquem gradum in entibus obtinet, sive sit res completa, ut totum aliquod, sive res incompleta, ut pars vel accidens. Secunda vero operatio respicit ipsum esse rei, quod quidem resultat ex congregatione principiorum rei in compositis vel ipsam simplicem naturam rei concomitatur, ut in substantiis simplicibus."

> which is act of that nature, as we understand composite substances by their forms…[251] (my trans.)

That which ensures objectivity in our intellectual knowing is the fact that, as with the senses, that which is known is something belonging to the things outside the mind:

> Consequently, in the act of understanding, the intelligible species received into the possible intellect functions as the thing by which one understands, and not as that which is understood, even as the species of color in the eye is not that which is seen, but that by which we see. And that which is understood is the very intelligible essence of things existing outside the soul, just as things outside the soul are seen by corporeal sight. For arts and sciences were discovered for the purpose of knowing things as existing in their own natures.[252]

That which is apprehended by the intellect is "something one" because there is "something one" in the thing itself. Again, knowing depends on things; whatever is in knowing must be something that is in the things themselves:

> Moreover, it produces these intelligibles by abstracting them from matter and from material conditions which are the principles of individuation. And since the nature as such of the species does not possess these principles by which the nature is given a multiple existence among different things, because individuating principles of this sort are distinct from the nature itself, the intellect will be able to receive this nature apart from all material conditions, and consequently will receive it as a unity [i.e., as a one-in-many].[253]

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[251] *In Boet. De Trin*. 5, 3, c.: "… [S]ecundum primam operationem potest abstrahere *ea quae secundum rem separata non sunt*, non tamen omnia, sed aliqua. Cum enim unaquaeque res sit intelligibilis, secundum quod est in actu, ut dicitur in *IX Metaphysicae*, oportet quod ipsa natura sive quiditas rei intelligatur: vel secundum quod est actus quidam, sicut accidit de ipsis formis et substantiis simplicibus, vel secundum id quod est actus eius, sicut substantiae compositae per suas formas…"

[252] *CG* II, 75, par. 7: "Habet se igitur species intelligibilis recepta in intellectu possibili in intelligendo sicut id quo intelligitur, non sicut id quod intelligitur: sicut et species coloris in oculo non est id quod videtur, sed id quo videmus. *Id vero quod intelligitur, est ipsa ratio rerum existentium extra animam*: sicut et res extra animam existentes visu corporali videntur. Ad hoc enim inventae sunt artes et scientiae ut res in suis naturis existentes cognoscantur."

[253] *Q.D. De Anima*, a. 4, c.: "Facit autem [intelligibilia in actu] per abstractionem a materia, et a materialibus conditionibus, quae sunt principia individuationis. Cum enim natura speciei, quantum ad id quod per se ad speciem pertinet, non habeat unde multiplicetur in diversis, sed individuantia principia sint praeter rationem ipsius; poterit intellectus accipere eam praeter omnes conditiones

The indivisibility of the intelligible nature in the thing itself is the reason to affirm the indivisibility of the intellect (note again the reasoning from the object to the subjective conditions). What is relevant for the present purposes is that the materiality of a thing does not prevent it from having an indivisible nature.

> Notice that Aristotle is implying here that intellect is indivisible of its nature. What is intelligible in any thing is its essence or nature; which is present wholly in every part of it, as the specific nature is wholly present in each individual of the species; the whole nature of man in each individual man; and the individual as such is indivisible. Hence what is intelligible in anything is indivisible; and therefore so is the intellect[254]

The most clear text in St. Thomas' commentary on the *De Anima*, regarding the presence of the universal nature in the things themselves, seems to be the following. The difference between St. Thomas' view and Plato's is not that the object of knowing is *extra animam* but that, for St. Thomas, it is not separate from the material things (as it is for

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individuantes; et sic accipietur aliquid unum." Cf. *Q.D. De Anima*, a.3, ad 8: "… according to Aristotle, the fact that the intellect understands a one-in-many in abstraction from individuating principles, is to be attributed to the intellect itself. And though nothing abstract exists in reality, the intellect is not void of any real content, nor is it misrepresentative of things as they are; because, of those things which necessarily exist together, one can be truly understood or named without another being understood or named. But it cannot be truly understood or said of things existing in this way, that one exists without the other. Thus whatever exists in an individual which pertains to the nature of its species, and in respect of which it is like other things, can be known and spoken of truly without taking into consideration its individuating principles, which distinguish it from all other individuals." [… secundum sententiam Aristotelis hoc est ab intellectu, scilicet quod intelligat unum in multis per abstractionem a principiis individuantibus. *Nec tamen intellectus est vanus aut falsus*, licet non sit *aliquid abstractum* in rerum natura. Quia eorum *quae sunt simul*, unum potest vere intelligi aut nominari, absque hoc quod intelligatur vel nominetur alterum; licet non possit vere intelligi vel dici, quod eorum quae sunt simul, unum sit sine altero. Sic igitur vere potest considerari et dici *id quod est in aliquo individuo, de natura speciei, in quo simile est cum aliis*, absque eo quod considerentur in eo principia individuantia, secundum quae distinguitur ab omnibus aliis.]

[254] *In I De Anima* 8, 123-131: "Et notandum, quod hic Aristoteles occulte ostendit, quod intellectus de natura sua non est partibilis, sed quid impartibile. Intelligibile enim in unaquaque re est quidditas, et natura rei est tota in qualibet parte, sicut natura speciei est tota in quolibet individuo: tota enim natura hominis est in quolibet individuo, et hoc est indivisibile: unde illud quod est intelligibile in qualibet re, est indivisibile, et *per consequens* intellectus."

Plato). Moreover, the presence of the object in the material things is a metaphysical presence, to the extent that the individual conditions *accompany* the universal nature:

> *The intellect's proper object is indeed the essence of things; but not the essence by itself, in separation from things, as the Platonists thought*. Hence this 'proper object' of our intellect is not, as the Platonists held, something existing, outside sensible things; *it is something intrinsic to sensible things*; and this, even though the mode in which essences are grasped by the mind differs from their mode of existence in sensible things; for the mind discerns them apart from the *individuating conditions which belong to them in the order of sensible reality*.[255]

Another text a few lines later tells us that the object of intelligence, the *quidditas*, is present in the things themselves as much as is the object of sensibility. Because of this we can say that science is of the things themselves, and not of the species as subjective modifications:

> Furthermore, it is clear that the intelligible ideas by which the potential intellect is actualised are not in themselves the intellect's object: for they are not that which,

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[255] *In III De Anima* 2, 240-249: "… *[P]roprium obiectum intellectus est quidditas rei, quae non est separata a rebus, ut Platonici posuerunt*. Unde illud, quod est obiectum intellectus nostri non est aliquid extra res sensibiles existens, ut Platonici posuerunt, sed *aliquid in rebus sensibilibus existens*; licet intellectus apprehendat alio modo quidditates rerum, quam sint in rebus sensibilibus. Non enim apprehendit eas cum *conditionibus individuantibus*, *quae eis in rebus sensibilibus adiunguntur*." Cf. *In III De Anima* 2, 63-86: "And whilst Plato had separated the quiddities (called by him 'ideas' or 'species') of things from things in their singularity, Aristotle was concerned to show that quiddities are only accidentally distinct from singular things. For example, a white man and his essence are distinct […] And the same is true of anything whose form exists in matter; there is something in it besides its specific principle. The specific nature is individualised through matter; hence the individualising principles and individual accidents are not included in the essence as such. That is why there can be many individuals of the same specific nature—having this nature in common, whilst they differ in virtue of their individuating principles. Hence, in all such things, the thing and its essence are not quite identical. Socrates is not his humanity." [Et quia Plato ponebat quidditates rerum esse separatas a singularibus, quas dicebat ideas, vel species; ideo ostendit, quod quidditates rerum non sunt aliud a rebus nisi per accidens; utputa non est idem quidditas hominis albi, et homo albus (…) Hoc autem contingit in omnibus habentibus formam in materia, quia *in eis est aliquid praeter principia speciei*. Nam natura speciei individuatur per materiam: unde *principia individuantia et accidentia individui sunt praeter essentiam speciei*. Et ideo contingit sub una specie inveniri plura individua: quae *licet non differant in natura speciei, differunt tamen secundum principia individuantia*. Et propter hoc *in omnibus habentibus formam in materia, non est omnino idem, et res et quod quid est eius*. Socrates enim non est sua humanitas.]

> but that by which it understands. For, as with sight the image in the eye is not what is seen, but what gives rise to the act of sight (for what is seen is colour which exists in an exterior body), so also what the intellect understands is the essence existing in things; it is not its own intelligible idea, except in so far as the intellect reflects upon itself. Because, obviously, it is what the mind understands that makes up the subject-matter of the sciences; and all these, apart from rational science, have realities for their subject-matter, not ideas. Clearly then, the intellect's object is not the intelligible idea, but the essence of intelligible realities.[256]

The following text can be taken as a clear expression of the Thomistic fact as has been discussed in section 1 of this *Chapter*.[257] Here, what is relevant is that the *quidditas* not being intelligible in act goes together with the *quidditas* being in the material things, contrary to Plato's idea of the *quidditas* being separate from the material things:

> The reason why Aristotle came to postulate an agent intellect was his rejection of Plato's theory that the essences of sensible things existed apart from matter, in a state of actual intelligibility. For Plato there was clearly no need to posit an agent intellect. But Aristotle, who regarded the essences of sensible things as existing in

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[256] *In III De Anima* 2, 264-279: "Manifestum est etiam, quod species intelligibiles, quibus intellectus possibilis fit in actu, non sunt obiectum intellectus. Non enim se habent ad intellectum sicut quod intelligitur, sed sicut quo intelligit. Sicut enim species, quae est in visu, non est quod videtur, sed est quo visus videt; *quod autem videtur est color, qui est in corpore; similiter quod intellectus intelligit est quidditas, quae est in rebus*; non autem species intelligibilis, nisi inquantum intellectus in seipsum reflectitur. Manifestum est enim quod *scientiae sunt de his quae intellectus intelligit. Sunt autem scientiae de rebus, non autem de speciebus*, vel intentionibus intelligibilibus, nisi sola scientia rationalis. Unde manifestum est, quod species intelligibilis non est obiectum intellectus, sed quidditas rei intellectae."

[257] Cf. in the same sense *De Spirit. Creat.,* a.9, c.: "And similarly it would not be necessary to posit an agent intellect if the universals which are actually intelligible subsisted of themselves outside the soul, as Plato asserted. But because Aristotle asserted that these universals do not subsist except in sensible objects, which are not actually intelligible, he necessarily had to posit some power, which would make the objects that are intelligible in potency to be actually intelligible, by abstracting the species of things from matter and from individuating conditions; and this power is called the agent intellect." [Et similiter non esset necesse ponere intellectum agentem, si universalia quae sunt intelligibilia actu, per se subsisterent extra animam, sicut posuit Plato. Sed quia Aristoteles posuit ea non subsistere nisi in sensibilibus, quae non sunt intelligibilia actu, necesse habuit ponere aliquam virtutem quae faceret intelligibilia in potentia esse intelligibilia actu, abstrahendo species rerum a materia et conditionibus individuantibus; et haec virtus vocatur intellectus agens.]

> matter with only a potential intelligibility, had to invoke some abstractive principle in the mind itself to render these essences actually intelligible.[258]

De Spirit. Creat., a.10, ad 8 should be quoted in its entirety.[259] In the *corpus*, Aquinas says: "For one particular man, such as Socrates or Plato, makes things intelligible in act when he pleases, that is, by apprehending a universal form from particulars, when he separates that which is common to all individual men from those things which are peculiar

[258] *In III De Anima* 4, 54-63: "Inducitur autem Aristoteles ad ponendum intellectum agentem, ad excludendum opinionem Platonis, qui posuit quidditates rerum sensibilium esse a materia separatas, et intelligibiles actu; unde non erat ei necessarium ponere intellectum agentem. Sed quia Aristoteles ponit, quod *quidditates rerum sensibilium sunt in materia, et non intelligibiles actu*, oportuit quod poneret aliquem intellectum qui abstraheret a materia, et sic faceret eas intelligibiles actu." Cf. *In III De Anima* 6, 274-276: "Therefore the intellect abstracts things present in the sense-objects, not understanding them to be separate, but understanding them in separation and distinctly." (my trans.) [*Ea ergo quae sunt in sensibilibus abstrahit intellectus, non quidem intelligens ea esse separata, sed separatim et seorsum ea intelligens*.]; 7, 64-77: "… [T]he doctrine just stated […] might lead one to suppose that the intellect did not depend on the senses; as would be the case indeed if the intelligible objects attained by our mind had their existence apart from sensible things, as the Platonists thought […] First, then, he observes that, since all the objects of our understanding are included within the range of sensible things existing in space, that is to say, that none seems to have that sort of distinct existence apart from things of sense which particular things of sense have apart from one another, it follows that all these intelligible objects have their beings in the objects of sense…" [… posset aliquis credere, quod intellectus non dependeret a sensu. *Et hoc quidem verum esset si intelligibilia nostri intellectus essent a sensibilibus separata secundum esse, ut Platonici posuerunt* (…) Dicit ergo primo, quod quia nulla res intellecta a nobis, est praeter magnitudines sensibiles, quasi ab eis separata secundum esse, sicut sensibilia videntur abinvicem separata: *necesse est quod intelligibilia intellectus nostri sint in speciebus sensibilibus secundum esse*…]

[259] Cf. *Appendix*, Note 4 (partially quoted). Most interesting is the final phrase of this response: "Now it does not matter much if we say that intelligible things themselves are participated […] from God, or that the light which makes them intelligible is participated […] from God." [Non multum autem refert dicere, quod ipsa intelligibilia participentur a Deo, vel quod lumen faciens intelligibilia participetur.] More than a conciliatory phrase (between St. Augustine and Aristotle), it seems to me the assumption of the most powerful intuition of the Doctor of Hippo: in any case, as St. Augustine saw clearly, there is a participation from God, God must be the source of truth. Not though as providing the truth as content (as the holy Doctor seems to have proposed) but as providing with nature an infallible light to discover the truth of things.

to each."[260] Once again, that which is common is taken to exist in composition with the individuating features, and it is distinguished from them.

The text in *De Spirit. Creat.*, a.9, ad 6 will occupy us more directly and extensively in *Chapter 2*, but a short reference may confirm the point at hand:

> For there is no difference between Aristotle and Plato, except in this: that Plato asserted that the thing which is understood has actual being outside the soul in exactly the same way as the intellect understands it, that is, as something abstract and universal; but Aristotle asserted "that the thing which is understood is outside the soul, but in another way, because it is understood in the abstract and has actual being in the concrete. […] Whereas Plato said that the sciences have to do with separated forms, Aristotle said that they have to do with the quiddities of things that exist in those things.[261]

Some texts from Aquinas' commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* will be presented now to show how, for Aquinas, the universal-nature exists in the singular material things.[262] The fact that the nature also includes matter, in a sense, does not make it less "universal":

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[260] *De Spirit. Creat.*, a.10, c.: "Unus enim homo particularis, ut Socrates vel Plato, facit cum vult intelligibilia in actu, apprehendendo scilicet universale a particularibus, dum *secernit id quod est commune omnibus individuis hominum, ab his quae sunt propria singulis*."

[261] *De Spirit. Creat.*, a.9, ad 6: "Non enim est differentia inter Aristotelem et Platonem, nisi in hoc quod Plato posuit quod res quae intelligitur eodem modo habet esse extra animam quo modo eam intellectus intelligit, idest ut abstracta et communis; Aristoteles vero posuit *rem quae intelligitur esse extra animam, sed alio modo*, quia intelligitur abstracte et habet esse concrete. […] *Plato quidem dixit scientias esse de formis separatis, Aristoteles vero de quidditatibus rerum in eis existentibus*." Cf. *De Spirit. Creat.,* a.9, c..

[262] In my interpretation of *In Metaphysicorum*, the universal as the common nature existing in the concrete coincides with the *quod quid erat esse*, which for Aquinas is first of all the formal principle (with the matter of the species included) of the real material substance (cf. *In Met*. 7, lect. 2, 1275; lect. 5, 1379; lect. 7, 1422; lect. 9, 1470; lect. 10, 1491. 1497; lect. 11, 1535). The definition is also *of* the *quod quid erat esse* (sometimes called also *quod quid est*) and there is an identity *of content* between the object of definition and the common nature in reality. The difference is in the mode of being (with the individual conditions in reality, abstracted from them in the definition of the intellect). The definition is the *species expressa* of the simple apprehension, and therefore not a judgment; and the definition represents the *quod quid erat esse*, and not the proposition that attributes the *quod quid erat esse* to a thing. These general remarks may assist in understanding for example *Summa* I, 85, 2 ad 3.

Aquinas draws a distinction between the matter that belongs to the species and the individual matter. What is relevant for us now is that the common species, matter and form, belongs to the individual and is distinguished from its individual matter; and that it is this species which is the object of definition:

> For, as was said above, what the definition signifies is the essence, and definitions are not assigned to individuals but to species; and therefore individual matter, which is the principle of individuation, is distinct from the essence. But in reality it is impossible for a form to exist except in a particular substance. Hence if any natural thing has matter which is part of its species, and this pertains to its essence, it must also have individual matter, which does not pertain to its essence. Therefore, if any natural thing has matter, it is not its own essence but is something having an essence; for example, Socrates is not humanity but something having humanity.[263]

When the existence of the universals is denied, it is only in the sense of existing as such, as one separate from the many:

> Hence, if universals as universals are things, they must be distinct from singulars, which are not universals. […] However, for those who claim that genera and species are not things or natures distinct from singulars but are the singular things themselves (for example, that there is no man who is not this man), it does not follow that second substance signifies an accident or modification.[264]

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[263] *In Met.* 7, lect. 11, 1535: "Sicut enim supra dictum est, quod quid erat esse est id quod significat definitio. Definitio autem non assignatur individuis, sed speciebus; et ideo materia individualis, quae est individuationis principium est praeter id quod est quod quid erat esse. *Impossibile est autem in rerum natura esse speciem nisi in hoc individuo.* Unde oportet quod quaelibet res naturae, si habeat materiam quae est pars speciei, quae est pertinens ad quod quid est, quod etiam habeat materiam individualem, quae non pertinet ad quod quid est. Unde nulla res naturae si materiam habeat, est ipsum quod quid est, sed *est habens illud*. Sicut Socrates non est humanitas, sed est humanitatem habens."

[264] *In Met.* 7, lect. 13, 1582f: "Si ergo universalia, inquantum universalia sunt, sint res quaedam, oportebit quod sint aliae res a singularibus, quae non sunt universalia […] Sed ponentibus quod genera et species non sunt aliquae res vel naturae aliae a singularibus, sed ipsamet singularia, sicut quod non est homo qui non sit hic homo, non sequitur quod secundae substantiae significent accidens vel passionem." Cf. *In Met.* 12, lect. 4, 2482 and *passim*. Every time he says that the universal does not exist, he means that the nature of sensible things does not exist in reality in a state of intellectual abstraction, in the Platonic sense; in other words, that it does not exist separate from the particular things. Cf. *Q.D. De Anima*, a.4, c.: "Moreover, the intelligible […] which the possible intellect understands does not exist in reality (as an intelligible); for our possible intellect

The universal does not exist as one (separate) thing, but it does exist as a common thing in the particulars:

> Unity itself cannot be present in many things at the same time; for this is opposed to the notion of unity, [so long as we are talking about a unity which exists by itself as a substance]. But what is common is present in many things at the same time, for common means what may be predicated of many things and be present in many things.[265] Hence it is clear that a common unity cannot be one in the sense that it is one substance. Furthermore, it is evident from all the points already discussed above in this chapter that no universal—either being or unity or genera or species—has a separate being apart from singular things.[266]

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understands something as though it were a one-in-many and common to many […] However, such an entity is not found subsisting in (sensible) reality, as Aristotle proves in the Metaphysics." [Intelligibile autem per intellectum possibilem non est aliquid in rerum natura existens, *in quantum intelligibile est*; intelligit enim intellectus possibilis noster aliquid quasi unum in multis et de multis. Tale autem non invenitur in rerum natura subsistens, ut Aristoteles probat in *VII Metaphys*..]

[265] Cf. *In Met.* 10, lect. 3, 1963-1964: "… no universal can be a substance which subsists of itself because every universal is common to many. A universal also cannot be a subsisting substance because otherwise it would have to be one thing apart from the many, and then it could not be common but would be in itself a singular thing […] and thus it must be in some way a one-in-many, and not something subsisting apart from them." (underline mine) [… nullum universalium esse potest substantia, quae scilicet per se sit subsistens; quia *omne universale commune est multis*. Nec possibile est universale esse substantiam subsistentem; quia sic oporteret quod esset unum praeter multa, et ita non esset commune, sed esset quoddam singulare in se (…) *oportet quod aliquo modo sit unum in multis, et non seorsum subsistens ab eis*.]; *In Met.* 10, lect. 1, 1930: **"**For in distinct singular things there is no nature numerically one which can be called a species, but the intellect apprehends as one that attribute in which all singulars agree. Hence the species, which is distinct in distinct individuals in reality, becomes undivided when apprehended by the intellect." [Non enim in diversis singularibus est aliqua natura una *numero*, quae possit dici species. Sed intellectus apprehendit ut unum *id in quo omnia inferiora conveniunt*. Et sic in apprehensione intellectus, species fit indivisibilis, quae realiter est diversa in diversis individuis.] "*Realiter diversa*" means that each individual has its own nature, and therefore is not *una numero*. But that nature is common (*una formaliter*), insofar as there is something in which all of the individuals concur ("*conveniunt*").

[266] *In Met*. 7, lect. 16, 1641: "… [H]oc ipsum quod est unum, non potest apud multa simul inveniri. Hoc enim est contra rationem unius, si tamen ponatur aliquod unum per se existens ut substantia. Sed *illud quod est commune, est simul apud multa. Hoc enim est ratio communis, ut de multis praedicetur, et in multis existat*. Patet igitur quod unum quod est commune, non potest esse sic unum quasi una substantia. Et ulterius palam est ex omnibus praedictis in hoc capitulo, quod *nullum universale, nec ens, nec unum, nec genera, nec species habent esse separatum praeter singularia*." As with many texts in Aquinas, the existence of the universal in the particulars could be taken to mean that they are in the particulars insofar as they are predicated of them, and so their in-existence in the particular would depend on a subjective function or action. But this would be not to realize that what St. Thomas is doing is precisely presenting an alternative to Plato, with Aristotle.

The species enters into real composition with individual matter and, because of that, the real particular substance is corruptible. Notice how the species is called "*rationem conceptam*" insofar as it is the content of definition:

> And I say that these differ; i.e., 'that the latter,' which is substance in the sense of the concrete whole, is substance taken as something having its intelligible structure conceived with matter; but the former, which is the form or intelligible structure or essence of a thing, is the intelligible structure or form in general, and this does not have individual matter connected with it. Therefore all those things which are called substance in the sense of a composite are capable of being corrupted.[267]

What is known in the simple apprehension (= "*quod significat definitio*") is the same nature which is present in the thing itself together with the individuating principles. Notice how, in this text, *quod quid erat esse* is equated with *natura speciei*, *quidditas* and *quod quid est esse suum*:

> The reason for this position is that essence is what the definition signifies, and the definition signifies the nature of the species. But if there is something which is composed of matter and form, then in that thing there must be some other principle besides the nature of the species. For since matter is the principle of individuation, then in anything composed of matter and form there must be certain individuating

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Plato had denied the presence of the universal object of understanding in the material things themselves; St. Thomas is opposing him on that point, by means of a distinction between the mode of being of the universal in reality and in the intellect, with the intellect always depending on reality (cf. *In Met* I, lect. 10, 158; *In Met.* 9, lect.11, 1896-1898; *In I Sent*. d. 2, q. 1, a.3, c.). In a sense, this whole dissertation is meant to clarify this point in the interpretation of Aquinas.

[267] *In Met.* 7, lect. 15, 1606f: "Dico autem eas esse alteras quia hoc quidem, scilicet substantia, quae est totum, sic est substantia sicut habens rationem conceptam cum materia; illa vero, quae est sicut forma et ratio et quod quid erat esse, est totaliter ratio et forma non habens materiam individualem adiunctam. Quaecumque igitur dicuntur substantiae hoc modo sicut composita, eorum potest esse corruptio."

The reason for calling the species or form *ratio* (cf. also *In Met*. 12, lect. 10, 2595) can be taken from *In Met.* 8, lect. 1, 1687 (text in *Appendix*, Note 5). Notice how, although the name *ratio* comes from reason, what is in reason comes ("sumitur") from reality. Notice also how the form of the thing is something "actu": the content of intellectual knowing is already actual in this sense; it is in potency only of its intelligible mode of being. The content of intellectual knowing is the perfection of a material thing which, because of its character as perfection, is already in act. The fact that it is in matter does not make it into potency, but rather it makes the perfection concrete.

> principles distinct from the nature of the species. Hence such a thing is not just its own essence but is something in addition to this. But if such a thing exists which is only a form, it will have no individuating principles in addition to the nature of its species. For a form that exists of itself is individuated of itself. Therefore this thing is nothing else than its own essence.[268]

The intellect's first operation is characterized as a reaching out to grasp (*attingere*) something of the thing itself, namely its *quod quid est* or *quid est*:

> The intellect is deceived about a quiddity only accidentally; for either a person comes in contact with a thing's quiddity through his intellect, and then he truly knows what that thing is; or he does not come in contact with it, and then he does not know what it is. Hence, with regard to such a thing the intellect is neither true nor false.[269]

Stump,[270] Berger,[271] and Baltuta[272] seem to share the interpretation herein proposed regarding the presence of the universal nature in the things themselves. For the reasons previously exposed, Owens is more reticent to affirm something like that, and interprets Aquinas' denial of the existence of the universal in reality[273] as a denial of a common nature

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[268] *In Met.* 8, lect. 3, 1710: "Et huius ratio est, quia quod quid erat esse est id quod significat definitio. *Definitio autem significat naturam speciei*. Si autem aliqua res est, quae sit composita ex materia et forma, oportet quod *in illa re* sit aliquid praeter *naturam speciei*. Cum enim materia sit individuationis principium, oportet quod in quolibet composito ex materia et forma sint principia individuantia, quae sunt praeter naturam speciei. Unde *huiusmodi res non tantum est quidditas sua, sed aliquid praeter hoc*. Si qua vero res est, quae sit forma tantum, non habet aliqua principia individuantia praeter naturam speciei, cum ipsa forma per se existens per seipsam individuetur. Et ideo ipsa res nihil aliud est quam quod quid est esse suum."

[269] *In Met*. 9, lect. 11, 1907: "Circa quod quid est non decipitur intellectus nisi per accidens: aut enim per intellectum attingit aliquis quod quid est rei, et tunc vere cognoscit quid est res; aut non attingit, et tunc non apprehendit rem illam. Unde circa eam non verificatur neque decipitur."

[270] Cf. Stump, 264: "By 'quiddity' here Aquinas means that form of a thing that put it into one rather than another species or genus, its nature or essence. Natures do not exist in the world on their own; in the world they exist only as incorporated into the things that have natures." And in note "See, e.g., *In DA* III.8.705–706."

[271] Cf. Berger, 44: "The intellectual act refers to the natures of the sensible things, understood as immaterial forms of material things."

[272] Cf. Baltuta, 151.

[273] Cf. *In Met.* 11, lect. 2, 2189: "Although universals do not exist of themselves, it is still necessary to consider universally the natures of things which subsist of themselves." [Licet

in the things themselves.[274] Cory says: "The phantasm […] is potentially intelligible and individual through-and-through, whereas actually intelligible, universal horseness exists only in the intellect"[275] and in note gives an interesting clarification:

> [Quoting *Q.D. De Anima*, a. 4] *Intelligit enim intellectus possibilis noster aliquid quasi unum in multis et de multis. Tale autem non inuenitur in rerum natura subsistens*.[276] This is not to deny Aquinas's realism about essences; he holds that Marengo and other horses really do share a common nature, although this nature exists extramentally only as instantiated as individual horses (hence the famous statement from *De ente et essentia* 2 [Leon. 43.374:80–82]: *[I]n Sorte non inuenitur communitas aliqua, sed quicquid est in eo est individuatum*[277]). Whether this position is in fact consistent with realism about essences, is not within the scope of this paper.[278]

Now, in order to truly understand abstraction, is this really a problem we can set aside? Abstraction is not simply the spiritualization of the phantasm, but an operation that gives us a different (heterogeneous) *content*. The "scandal" of abstraction is not that the phantasm receives a different mode of being, but that I know a universal nature, a *whatness* in the phantasm, that seems not to be real because it is not particular. Is that universal

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universalia non per se existant, tamen naturas eorum quae per se subsistunt est considerare universaliter.]

[274] Cf. the *Introduction* of this dissertation; Owens, 134: "The reason we need an express species is because the object does not exist in universal fashion in the sensible thing."

[275] Therese Cory, "Rethinking Abstractionism: Aquinas's Intellectual Light and Some Arabic Sources," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 53, no. 4 (2015): 613.

[276] "For our possible intellect understands something as though it were a one-in-many and common to many. However, such an entity is not found subsisting in reality" (*Q.D. De Anima*, a. 4, c.).

[277] "In Socrates there is no commonness, but whatever is in him is individuated" (*De Ente et Essentia*, 2).

[278] Cory, *Rethinking*, 613 note 21.

content real or not? This is most relevant because this is the condition of possibility of abstraction.[279]

4) The Role of the Agent Intellect and its Necessity: To Make Intelligible in Act the Universal *in re*

In the previous sections we have tried to clarify what is for St. Thomas the cognitional fact requiring an agent intellect as its explanation. The fact is that we know the nature of the corporeal thing, that is, its universal aspect, but this nature is not intelligible in act. We have also considered some of the presuppositions of this fact, namely, the specific difference between the object of intelligence and the object of sensibility, and also the subsistence of the object of intelligence (the universal) in the particular real things. In light of these considerations, we now turn to study more closely that which St. Thomas says about the role of the agent intellect. The view herein proposed is that the role of the agent intellect is to make intelligible in act the universal *in re*, i.e. the nature of the corporeal thing, so that this nature may be seen by the possible intellect.

The role of the agent intellect is characterized as "facere intelligibilia in actu." In order to understand what St. Thomas means when he speaks about this "facere intelligibilia

[279] I suggest that a more helpful approach to the causal problem (cf. Cory, *Averroes*, 4) in Aquinas would be to take as a point of departure, not the immateriality of the effect *of the phantasm* in the possible intellect, but the universality of the known (intelligibility as content), and the fact that this content is present in the intellect with a mode of being that (the *same* content) does not have in its presence in the phantasm. In other words, the point of departure for the causal problem (what I call the "Thomistic fact") should be the intelligible mode of being of the universal content, not the intelligible mode of being of the particular content (Cf. Section 1 of this *Chapter*). I have the impression that Cory's point of departure is the latter alternative. Cf. Cory, *Averroes*, 23: "The Agent Intellect must accomplish some sort of metaphysical change that makes images capable of affecting the Material Intellect."

in actu," what must be kept in mind is a series of actualizations which, in Aquinas' mind, must take place in order to explain the fact that we simply understand. This fact is already an actualization; that is, we pass from understanding in potency to understanding in act. The perfection which allows us to understand, that which formally actualizes our faculty, is the intelligible nature of a corporeal thing, already in act of being intelligible. Now, that intelligible is not available to the intelligence, insofar as the nature of a corporeal thing is not out there already intelligible in act; the intelligible exists only in the potentiality of the phantasm. In order for the intelligible in potency, which is in the phantasm, to become intelligible in act, an agent, an efficient cause is needed. Therefore, it is the agent intellect which, in an efficient way, actualizes the intelligible in potency so that it becomes intelligible in act; but it is the intelligible in act which, in a formal way, actualizes the possible intellect, which was previously in potency.[280] We could go even further by affirming, with St. Thomas, a previous actualization: the phantasm, again by the action of the agent intellect, receives the ability that from itself intelligible species may be abstracted; in other words, receives the *potential intelligibility* itself.[281] This is because, for St. Thomas, it does not seem right to

[280] The necessity of the intelligible in act in human understanding could be found in Plato also, but not the necessity of an agent intellect (at least not in the Aristotelian sense, cf. 79, 3). Cf. *De Spirit. Creat*., a.9, c.: "And similarly it would not be necessary to posit an agent intellect if the universals which are actually intelligible subsisted of themselves outside the soul, as Plato asserted. But because Aristotle asserted that these universals do not subsist except in sensible objects, which are not actually intelligible, he necessarily had to posit some power, which would make the objects that are intelligible in potency to be actually intelligible…" [Et similiter non esset necesse ponere intellectum agentem, si universalia quae sunt intelligibilia actu, per se subsisterent extra animam, sicut posuit Plato. Sed quia Aristoteles posuit ea non subsistere nisi in sensibilibus, quae non sunt intelligibilia actu, necesse habuit ponere aliquam virtutem quae faceret intelligibilia in potentia esse intelligibilia actu…]

[281] Cf. 85, 1 ad 4: "Not only does the active intellect throw light on the phantasm: it does more; by its own power it abstracts the intelligible species from the phantasm. It throws light on the

ascribe an intelligible potentiality, which is of a different order, to something merely material.[282]

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phantasm, because, just as the sensitive part acquires a greater power by its conjunction with the intellectual part, so by the power of the active intellect the phantasms are made […] fit for the abstraction therefrom of intelligible intentions." [Phantasmata et illuminantur ab intellectu agente; et iterum ab eis, per virtutem intellectus agentis, species intelligibiles abstrahuntur. Illuminantur quidem, quia, sicut pars sensitiva ex coniunctione ad intellectivam efficitur virtuosior, ita phantasmata ex virtute intellectus agentis redduntur habilia ut ab eis intentiones intelligibiles abstrahantur.]

[282] I speak here about intelligibility as mode of being, which implies immateriality (we will see especially in *Chapter 2* the two meanings of intelligible and universal in Aquinas). The Thomistic doctrine of the celestial bodies' influence in sensible knowing is in my view related to this. Fabro treats this issue in *PP* 64-68, quoting extensively Aquinas' *De Potentia,* q. 5, a. 8. In Fabro's reading, Aquinas affirms in the sensible bodies a double causality by the influence of the celestial bodies: one physical and the other *intentional*, by which the sensible bodies are able to perfect the faculties of the senses not only physically but also cognitively. It is, I suggest, the same principle that Aquinas uses in 85, 1 ad 4. In order for something to be known, it must be knowable in act; for something to be knowable in act, it must be knowable in potency, that is to say, it needs to have the ability to be knowable in act. But knowability, in potency or in act, is a quality that does not belong to a sensible body merely for being what it is. This is because it implies a capacity to perfect a faculty of knowing, a perfection which for St. Thomas is a "second mode of being" (cf. *De Ver.* 2, 2) different from the physical mode of being. What produces in the sensible bodies this capacity of producing sensible knowing is the (second kind of) influence of the celestial bodies; what produces in the phantasm (which stands for the particular sensible thing) this ability of being intelligible in act is the agent intellect itself. We do not need an agent sense because, *granted the influence of the celestial bodies*, the perfection to be known (content) is already particular, and so sensible in act in its *physical* mode of being. We do need the *second action* of the agent intellect because, *even granted the first action of illumination*, the perfection to be known (in the phantasm) is still material, and so not intelligible in act in its physical mode of being. The celestial bodies and the first action of the agent intellect effect in the concrete things the ability to produce a cognitive species out of themselves (*De Pot.* q. 5, a. 8: "at communicating a certain likeness [of] its form to the 'medium,' which may be compared to the spiritual 'intention' which things impress on the senses or intelligence" [ad quamdam diffusionem similitudinis formae in medio secundum similitudinem spiritualis intentionis quae recipitur de re in sensu vel intellectu]; 85, 1 ad 4: "phantasms are made […] fit for the abstraction therefrom of intelligible intentions" [phantasmata (…) redduntur habilia ut ab eis intentiones intelligibiles abstrahantur]) or, perhaps better said, the ability in order to perfect cognitively a faculty of knowing. In the senses, because the perfection to be known is already particular (sensible in act), this influence is enough to make the act of sensation possible regarding the object. In intelligence, this influence is enough to elevate the concrete thing to the intentional intelligible *realm* but only as a being in potency and not in act. In other words, this influence gives to the phantasm as it were an intelligible *quality*, making it intelligible *in potency*, i.e. able to be the source of an intelligible species. Granted, as a condition of possibility, this first action of illumination, the second action of the agent intellect is required to produce the intelligibility *in act* of the content, by

Therefore, when St. Thomas says "facere intelligibilia in actu" he means that the agent intellect produces from the potentiality of the phantasm an intelligible species representing the nature of a corporeal thing, a species which is able (because it is in act) to perfect the possible intellect with the knowledge of that nature itself.[283]

Let us now review some texts. Probably the best is again 79, 3, c. "Now nothing is reduced from potentiality to act except by something in act; as the senses are made actual by what is actually sensible."[284] These words refer to the formal actualization by means of the intelligible in act, as the parallel with the senses suggests. But because the object of intelligence is not intelligible in act in the corporeal things, as he already says at the beginning of the corpus,[285] St. Thomas continues: "We must therefore assign on the part of

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means of a separation from its individual conditions in matter. That a cosmology of celestial bodies is today at least questionable, does not take away the metaphysical problem that Aquinas sees, nor the possibility of its solution by means of the separate substances' influence. I will come back briefly to this topic in *Chapter 4*.

[283] In this section, we are not focusing on the act of abstraction directly, but on the role of the agent intellect in the process of understanding, particularly its relationship to the act of the possible intellect. Abstraction and making intelligible are certainly related. Cf. *In III De Anima* 4, 50-53: "The agent intellect, on the other hand, actualises the intelligible notions themselves, [which were previously in potency,] abstracting them from matter: [it is in this way that they are intelligible in act]." [Intellectus autem agens facit ipsa intelligibilia esse in actu, quae prius erant in potentia, per hoc quod abstrahit ea a materia; sic enim sunt intelligibilia in actu, ut dictum est.] It is very important to keep in mind, with Cromp, the two meanings of abstraction: as action of the agent intellect and as consideration (or better "non-consideration") of the possible (cf. Germaine Cromp, *L'intellect agent et son rôle d'abstraction* [Canada?: 1980], 16ff.). St. Thomas speaks about this abstraction as non-consideration in 85, 1, ad 1 and ad 2.

[284] 79, 3, c.: "Nihil autem reducitur de potentia in actum, nisi per aliquod ens actu, sicut sensus fit in actu per sensibile in actu."

[285] Cf. also 79, 3 ad 3: "Now the intelligible in act is not something existing in nature; if we consider the nature of things sensible, which do not subsist apart from matter. And therefore in order to understand them, the immaterial nature of the passive intellect would not suffice but for the presence of the active intellect which makes things actually intelligible by way of abstraction." [Intelligibile autem in actu non est aliquid existens in rerum natura, quantum ad naturam rerum sensibilium, quae non subsistunt praeter materiam. Et ideo ad intelligendum non sufficeret

the intellect some power to make things actually intelligible, by abstraction of the species from material conditions. And such is the necessity for an active intellect."[286] The action of the agent intellect, called here "abstraction," is that which allows the act of the possible intellect, that is, understanding. These are two different passages from potency to act, by two different faculties: "Nevertheless there is a distinction between the power of the active intellect and of the passive intellect: because as regards the same object, the active power which makes the object to be in act must be distinct from the passive power, which is moved by the object existing in act."[287] In this latter text, the two aforementioned distinct processes of actualization can be seen clearly.

Another important passage about the nature and role of the agent intellect, in polemic with Averroes, is 88, 1, c.:

> As was shown above, the active intellect is not a separate substance; but a faculty of the soul, extending itself actively to the same objects to which the passive intellect extends receptively; because, as is stated (*De Anima iii*, 5), the passive intellect is 'all things potentially,' and the active intellect is 'all things in act.' Therefore both intellects, according to the present state of life, extend to material things only, which are made actually intelligible by the active intellect, and are received in the passive intellect.[288]

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immaterialitas intellectus possibilis, nisi adesset intellectus agens, qui faceret intelligibilia in actu per modum abstractionis.]

[286] 79, 3, c.: "Oportebat igitur ponere aliquam virtutem ex parte intellectus, quae faceret intelligibilia in actu, per abstractionem specierum a conditionibus materialibus. Et haec est necessitas ponendi intellectum agentem."

[287] 79, 7, c.: "Diversificatur tamen potentia intellectus agentis, et intellectus possibilis, quia respectu eiusdem obiecti, aliud principium oportet esse potentiam activam, quae facit obiectum esse in actu; et aliud potentiam passivam, quae movetur ab obiecto in actu existente."

[288] 88, 1, c.: "Supra ostensum est quod intellectus agens non est substantia separata, sed virtus quaedam animae, ad eadem active se extendens, ad quae se extendit intellectus possibilis receptive, quia, ut dicitur in *III De Anima*, intellectus possibilis est quo est omnia fieri, intellectus agens quo est omnia facere. Uterque ergo intellectus se extendit, secundum statum praesentis

The distinction between the two faculties and their respective roles is here very clear. Both faculties refer to the same object insofar as *what* is received by the possible intellect is *what* is made by the agent intellect: an intelligible in act. But these two faculties differ from each other, insofar as the action of the agent intellect is that of an "efficient causality" or active potency, and the act of the possible intellect that of a "material cause" or passive potency.[289] The fact that the possible intellect presupposes the product of the agent intellect in order to act, makes even more evident the distinction: it is not just a temporal distinction, but a metaphysical one. There is no way we can think of the actualization of the possible intellect if there is not an intelligible in act and, therefore, something like an agent intellect making the intelligible in act. The possible intellect cannot be actualized with anything else.

In the following text, the series of actualizations also is clear, and particularly clear is the way in which we could speak of the agent intellect actualizing the possible intellect: it is by means of the intelligible species produced in abstraction.

> [Our intellect] understands itself according as it is made actual by the species abstracted from sensible things, through the light of the active intellect, which not only actuates the intelligible things themselves, but also, by their instrumentality,

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vitae, ad materialia sola; quae intellectus agens facit intelligibilia actu, et recipiuntur in intellectu possibili."

[289] 85, 1 ad 4 should be understood in this same sense when speaking on abstraction: "Furthermore, the active intellect abstracts the intelligible species from the phantasm, forasmuch as by the power of the active intellect we are able [to take into our consideration the specific nature without the conditions of individuality, since the image of that specific nature] informs the passive intellect." [Abstrahit autem intellectus agens species intelligibiles a phantasmatibus, inquantum per virtutem intellectus agentis accipere possumus in nostra consideratione naturas specierum sine individualibus conditionibus, secundum quarum similitudines intellectus possibilis informatur.] The characterization of the agent intellect is active, whereas the possible intellect is the one which receives ("*accipere*") or is actualized ("*informatur*") by the species produced by the agent intellect.

> actuates the passive intellect. Therefore the intellect knows itself not by its essence, but by its act.[290]

The agent intellect, by an efficient causality on the material of sensibility, produces an intelligible in act which is then able to actualize the possible intellect. For St. Thomas, the possible intellect can receive—or be informed by—an intelligible in act *only*. Human intelligence, i.e., the faculty that understands, is in potency of the intelligible. That is why, if something like intellectual knowing happens, an intellectual agent is required in order to make that intelligible in act and impress it on the possible intellect.

Does this not imply that the agent intellect produces the object, or at least completes it formally? In the next *Chapter*, the crucial distinction between *res intellecta* and *modus rei intellectae* will be examined, and the tension between Thomism and Kantian philosophy will be brought more clearly to the fore.

It may be helpful to collect the findings of this first *Chapter* and assess what remains to be discussed. So far, the fact that brings Aquinas to introduce an agent intellect in human knowing has been elucidated. It is a double-sided fact. One side of this fact is that our intelligence knows the nature of corporeal things as something distinct from their sensible content and also present in the things themselves. Although already implied in many texts, the characterization of intellectual knowing as receptive of this content (the nature present in the thing itself) will be discussed in more detail in *Chapter 3*. The other side of this

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[290] 87, 1, c.: "… [C]onsequens est ut sic seipsum intelligat intellectus noster, secundum quod fit actu per species a sensibilibus abstractas per lumen intellectus agentis, quod est actus ipsorum intelligibilium, et eis mediantibus intellectus possibilis. Non ergo per essentiam suam, sed per actum suum se cognoscit intellectus noster." The meaning of the agent intellect as "actus ipsorum intelligibilium" (cf. also 87, 1 ad 2) will be examined later, in *Chapter 4*, section 1.

Thomistic fact is that those natures we know are not intelligible in act; that is to say, they cannot be known by our intelligence with the mode of being they have in the things themselves. Therefore, the fact that we actually know them necessarily implies that there is an agent intellect producing that mode of being, that intelligibility, which allows those natures to be received cognitively by the possible intellect. However, this Thomistic distinction between intelligible content and intelligibility as a mode of being, already anticipated to a certain extent, will be the precise focus of the next *Chapter*.

As is clear, the intention was not to demonstrate the Thomistic fact, but to demonstrate that this is a fact for Aquinas, exactly the fact that, in his mind, requires an agent intellect as a condition of possibility. Still, the demonstration so far may be found lacking, because the issues indicated in the previous paragraph have not been discussed in detail. I can only say that the issue at hand is very complex, and one could have begun in a different way, but a starting point was necessary, and it seemed fair to begin by the "fact," in this way, and simply anticipate for the reader what will be found in the next chapters. Hopefully, at the end, the reader will be satisfied regarding these anticipations.

Chapter Two: The Thomistic Distinction between the Object and the Mode of Being of the Object (*res intellecta* and *modus rei intellectae*)

It is here that the question of the agent intellect is seen to be relevant to the critical problem. According to Kant, because in reality there is nothing universal (all reality is particular), the origin of the universal in scientific knowledge must be the subject itself,[291] not the reality out there. Considered carefully, this line of thinking exposes the same error as that of Plato. That is, because Kant does not find, in the (particular) reality "out there," the object of understanding *in the way it is in our consciousness*, Kant must place the origin of this object, not in an old-fashioned Platonic world of ideas, but in a more modern concept of subjectivity.[292] Like Plato, Kant believes that the object of understanding must exist in the same way we know it; in other words, Kant does not differentiate between the object and its mode of being.[293] Because material reality can have nothing to do with our spirit (Descartes), because the particular is merely multiple and the universal is merely one, and because nothing like a universal can be *seen* in the particular, if there is universality in

[291] Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Guyer and Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), B 1-4.

[292] Cf. Owens, 323-324, where Plato is portrayed as admitting a double origin for human cognition, one being the knowledge of ever changing things coming through the senses, and the other being the knowledge of stable things coming from somewhere else, by anamnesis.

[293] In 84, 2 c., the same error is attributed to the Natural philosophers ("They thought that the form of the thing known is in the knower in the same mode as in the thing known." [Existimabant autem quod forma cogniti sit in cognoscente eo modo quo est in re cognita.]), but instead of making immaterial the *res intellecta* in its subsistence, as does Plato, they make the soul itself material, or composed of the same principles of the material things. Cf. *In I De Anima* 4, 19-36; 12, 10-15 (both texts in *Appendix*, Note 6).

our knowing, it must come from the subject itself; and, if the universal is referred to the particular, it must be by a function of the subject.

St. Thomas, by contrast, is careful to distinguish the object that is understood from the mode of being of the object. He also realizes, with Plato and Kant, that nothing in reality is intelligible in act, and that reality is particular; but he cannot deny the cognitive fact that we understand corporeal things, that we know them not only in their individuality but also in their nature, in their specific perfection. He cannot overcome the *alterity* of the object of understanding: it is for St. Thomas a fact. Therefore, if the object of understanding is out there (*extra animam*), but not in the way we understand it, it is evident for him that there must be a difference between the object and the way in which the object is known or received in our faculties of knowing.

Therefore, whatever the related doctrinal difficulties may be, it seems clear that, for Aquinas, because what we understand is truly imbedded in the particular things themselves, the *res intellecta* and the *modus rei intellectae* cannot be the same. This is the immediate concern of this *Chapter*. The alterity of the object of knowing instead will be treated in the next *Chapter*.[294]

1) The Distinction in 84, 1, c.: The "Platonic Problem"

In the *Summa*, the passage that most clearly addresses this issue is 84, 1, c. The question is whether the soul knows the corporeal things by means of intelligence, and the point is located precisely in the problem of the universals. Having considered those who

[294] The distinction between the species as subjective modification and the object of knowing will be treated in *Chapter 3*, section 3.

denied the possibility of a scientific knowledge of reality because of its instability, having considered also Plato, who put stability outside the "apparent" reality in a true "world of reality" (his "ideas"), and having shown the inconvenience of Plato's solution, Aquinas goes to the root of the problem. The text will be quoted extensively, and commented upon when needed:

"Now it seems that Plato strayed from the truth because, having observed that all knowledge takes place through some kind of similitude, he thought that the form of the thing known must of necessity be in the knower in the same manner as in the thing known."[295] This is the main problem in the form of a general principle.[296] The following is an explanation of Plato's error in the intellectual realm:

> Then he observed that the form of the thing understood is in the intellect under conditions of universality, immateriality, and immobility: which is apparent from the very operation of the intellect, whose act of understanding has a universal extension, and is subject to a certain amount of necessity: for the mode of action corresponds to the mode of the agent's form.[297] Wherefore he concluded that the

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[295] 84, 1, c.: "Videtur autem in hoc Plato deviasse a veritate, quia, cum aestimaret omnem cognitionem per modum alicuius similitudinis esse, credidit quod forma cogniti ex necessitate sit in cognoscente eo modo quo est in cognito."

[296] Cf. 85, 1 ad 2: **"**Because Plato failed to consider the twofold kind of abstraction, as above explained […], he held that all those things which we have stated to be abstracted by the intellect, are abstract in reality" [Et quia Plato non consideravit quod dictum est de duplici modo abstractionis, omnia quae diximus abstrahi per intellectum, posuit abstracta esse secundum rem.] Cf. also *In Met.* 1, lect. 10, 158; *In I De Anima* 4, 30-33; *In III De Anima* 2, 261-263.

[297] Cf. 89, 6, c.: "Action offers two things for our consideration—its species and its mode. Its species comes from the object, whereto the faculty of knowledge is directed by the (intelligible) species, which is the object's similitude; whereas the mode is gathered from the power of the agent. Thus that a person see a stone is due to the species of the stone in his eye; but that he see it clearly, is due to the eye's visual power." [In actu est duo considerare, scilicet speciem actus, et modum ipsius. Et species quidem actus consideratur ex obiecto in quod actus cognoscitivae virtutis dirigitur per speciem, quae est obiecti similitudo, sed modus actus pensatur ex virtute agentis. Sicut quod aliquis videat lapidem, contingit ex specie lapidis quae est in oculo, sed quod acute videat, contingit ex virtute visiva oculi.]

> things which we understand must have in themselves an existence under the same conditions of immateriality and immobility.[298]

Here the Thomistic distinction between the *res intellecta* and the mode of being of the same is already very clear. St. Thomas proceeds by showing the inconsistency of Plato's principle, and he tries to make it more clear by using an interesting progression. In his first step, he considers the sensible realm in its objectivity: "But there is no necessity for this. For even in sensible things it is to be observed that the form is otherwise in one sensible than in another: for instance, whiteness may be of great intensity in one, and of a less intensity in another: in one we find whiteness with sweetness, in another without sweetness."[299] That

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[298] 84, 1, c.: "Consideravit autem quod forma rei intellectae est in intellectu universaliter et immaterialiter et immobiliter, quod ex ipsa operatione intellectus apparet, qui intelligit universaliter et per modum necessitatis cuiusdam; modus enim actionis est secundum modum formae agentis. Et ideo existimavit quod oporteret res intellectas hoc modo in seipsis subsistere, scilicet immaterialiter et immobiliter." Cf. regarding the error of Plato: *In Met.* 7, lect. 15, 1606; *In Met.* 12, lect. 1, 2423: "They did this because they investigated things from the viewpoint of dialectics; for they thought that universals, which are separate according to their mode of definition from sensible things, are also separate in reality, and that they are the principles of particular things." [Et hoc ideo, quia logice inquirebant de rebus. Universalia enim, quae secundum rationem sunt abstracta a sensibilibus, credebant etiam in rerum natura abstracta fore, et principia particularium.]; *In Met.* 12, lect. 2, 2426: "For just as a twofold method of separating is found in reason […] in a similar way they maintained that both universals, which they called separate Forms, and also the objects of mathematics, are separate in reality." [Sicut enim invenitur secundum rationem duplex modus separationis (…) ita et secundum rem ponebant et universalia esse separata, quae dicebant species, et etiam mathematica.]; *In Met*. 8, lect. 1, 1683: "Certain particular thinkers […] claim that the Forms and the objects of mathematics have separate existence. They adopted this position because they thought that for every abstraction of the intellect there is a corresponding abstraction in reality." [Quidam posuerunt *singulariter* eas (substantias) esse, qui ponunt species et mathematica separata secundum esse, volentes quod cuilibet abstractioni intellectus, respondeat abstractio in esse rerum.] Note in this last text how the universal is said to exist *singulariter*, insofar as, for Plato, it exists in reality as one thing, separated from the particular things. This is what Aquinas will always deny, and not the universal's existence *in* the singular. Cf. *Q.D. De Anima*, a.3, ad 8 where it is also very clear the presence of the common nature in the particular thing (text quoted in *Appendix*, Note 7).

[299] 84, 1, c.: "Hoc autem necessarium non est. Quia etiam in ipsis sensibilibus videmus quod forma alio modo est in uno sensibilium quam in altero, puta cum in uno est albedo intensior, in alio remissior, et in uno est albedo cum dulcedine, in alio sine dulcedine."

is to say, the real accidental quality *albedo*, being the same in every white thing, can subsist in different modes in different white things. St. Thomas is trying to show in this first step how easy it is for us to conceive that one and the same quality may exist in different modes. The second step is already in the gnoseological realm: "In the same way the sensible form is conditioned differently in the thing which is external to the soul, and in the senses which receive the forms of sensible things without receiving matter, such as the color of gold without receiving gold."[300] It seems the main reason St. Thomas uses the senses as an example here is the ease with which one can accept that, when we see the colour, we receive the colour not as it subsists in reality (with the gold included, in the example), but in another way. St. Thomas thus opens the way to the solution:

> So also the intellect, according to its own mode, receives under conditions of immateriality and immobility, the species of material and mobile bodies: for the received is in the receiver according to the mode of the receiver. We must conclude, therefore, that through the intellect the soul knows bodies by a knowledge which is immaterial, universal, and necessary.[301]

It seems clear that "*quae sunt materiales et mobiles*" refers to the plural "*species*" and not to "*corporum*," which is neutral. It should also be clear, however, that the species are material insofar as they subsist in the matter, but not as if they were nothing other than matter. The whole argument would be pointless. St. Thomas is highlighting precisely that, even if the form does not subsist in the same way in the intellect as it does in reality, this

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[300] 84, 1, c.: "Et per hunc etiam modum forma sensibilis alio modo est in re quae est extra animam, et alio modo in sensu, qui suscipit formas sensibilium absque materia, sicut colorem auri sine auro."

[301] 84, 1, c.: "Et similiter intellectus species corporum, quae sunt materiales et mobiles, recipit immaterialiter et immobiliter, secundum modum suum, nam receptum est in recipiente per modum recipientis. Dicendum est ergo quod anima per intellectum cognoscit corpora cognitione immateriali, universali et necessaria."

fact does not prevent the intellect from knowing *that same form*. St. Thomas is implying that the stability denied by the natural philosophers (regarding corporeal things), and projected by Plato in a parallel world, is actually imbedded in the material things as their form or species, but not in the immaterial way in which it is known.[302]

2) The Distinction in Other Texts

In 85, 2 ad 2, the distinction between what is understood and its mode of being is also clear, in direct response to the objection that what is understood in act does not subsist in the thing outside the soul:

> In these words 'the thing actually understood' there is a double implication—the thing which is understood, and [its being] understood. In like manner the words 'abstract universal' imply two things, the nature of a thing and its abstraction or universality. Therefore the nature itself to which it occurs to be understood, abstracted or considered as universal is only in individuals; but [its being] understood, abstracted or considered as universal is in the intellect.[303]

It cannot be more clear that the nature that we understand subsists in the thing out there, to the extent that it just "happens" to it that it is understood.[304] "Natura" is here

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[302] This stability in sensible things is also affirmed in *In Boet. De Trin.* 5, 2, c.; *In Met.* 11, lect. 6, 2232 (cf. other texts quoted on p. 87). Martínez Millán tells us: "In order to overcome Plato's Theory of Forms, Aristotle has to emphasize in many different ways the possibility that living things can be the objects of knowledge despite the fact that they are movable and perishable" (Martínez Millán, 50). "As Aquinas notes in *De Anima*, Aristotle wanted to overcome the negative effects of Platonic philosophy, which had reduced sensible things to nothing more tan shadows, objects of opinion but not of knowledge […] Aristotle […] had postulated the agent intellect in order to save the sensible world from the unknowable" (*Ibid*., 55-56).

[303] 85, 2 ad 2: "Cum dicitur intellectum in actu, duo importantur, scilicet res quae intelligitur, et hoc quod est ipsum intelligi. Et similiter cum dicitur universale abstractum, duo intelliguntur, scilicet ipsa natura rei, et abstractio seu universalitas. Ipsa igitur natura cui accidit vel intelligi vel abstrahi, vel intentio universalitatis, non est nisi in singularibus; sed hoc ipsum quod est intelligi vel abstrahi, vel intentio universalitatis, est in intellectu."

[304] Cf. *De Spirit. Creat*., a.10, ad 14: "The universal, which the agent intellect causes, is one thing in all the beings from which it is abstracted; and hence the agent intellect is not diversified on

slightly distinguished from "universale," the former with a clear metaphysical meaning, the latter with a more gnoseological one. St. Thomas, again, draws a comparison with the sensible realm to make the solution more clear (this time only in gnoseological terms):

> [We can see the point by a comparison with the senses]. For the sight sees the color of the apple apart from its smell. If therefore it be asked where is the color which is seen apart from the smell, it is quite clear that the color which is seen is only in the apple: but that it be perceived apart from the smell, this is owing to the sight, forasmuch as the faculty of sight receives the likeness of color and not of smell. [305]

Again, the *res intellecta* is in the thing itself, but its abstract *mode of being* depends on our understanding it. Because of this, the universal as a species-image refers to the (*real*) nature in the thing, not directly to its concreteness:

> In like manner humanity understood is only in this or that man; but that humanity be apprehended without conditions of individuality, that is, that it be abstracted and consequently considered as universal, occurs to humanity inasmuch as it is brought under the consideration of the intellect, in which there is a likeness of the specific nature, but not of the principles of individuality.[306]

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the basis of their diversification. However, it is diversified on the basis of a diversity of intellects: because even the universal does not derive its oneness from the standpoint of its being understood by me and by you; for it is accidental to the universal that it is understood by me and by you. And hence the diversity of intellects does not affect the oneness of the universal." [Universale quod facit intellectus agens, est unum in omnibus a quibus ipsum abstrahitur; unde intellectus agens non diversificatur secundum eorum diversitatem. Diversificatur autem [i. agens] secundum diversitatem intellectuum: quia et universale non ex ea parte habet unitatem qua est a me et a te intellectum; *intelligi enim a me et a te accidit universali*. Unde diversitas intellectuum non impedit unitatem universalis.] "Universal," here, is the content-nature present in reality to which "happens" to be known. The unity of the universal is objective, not subjective. This text also helps us to see the word "universal" as indicating a content, and not directly its mode of being in the intellect (cf. next section).

[305] 85, 2 ad 2: "Et hoc possumus videre per simile in sensu. Visus enim videt colorem pomi sine eius odore. Si ergo quaeratur ubi sit color qui videtur sine odore manifestum est quod color qui videtur, non est nisi in pomo; sed quod sit sine odore perceptus, hoc accidit ei ex parte visus, inquantum in visu est similitudo coloris et non odoris."

[306] 85, 2 ad 2: "Similiter humanitas quae intelligitur, non est nisi in hoc vel in illo homine, sed quod humanitas apprehendatur sine individualibus conditionibus, quod est ipsam abstrahi, ad quod sequitur intentio universalitatis, accidit humanitati secundum quod percipitur ab intellectu, in quo est similitudo naturae speciei, et non individualium principiorum." Cf. *In III De Anima* 2, 240-249:

A similar text in the *Contra Gentiles* distinguishes also the object from its mode of being:

> Nor need we follow Plato in holding that, because science is about universals, universals are self-subsisting entities outside the soul. For, although the truth of knowledge requires the correspondence of cognition to thing, this does not mean that these two must have the same mode of being. For things united in reality are sometimes known separately; in a thing that is at once white and sweet, sight knows only the whiteness, taste only the sweetness. […] Similarly, although the generic nature and the specific nature never exist except in individual things, the intellect nevertheless understands those natures without understanding the individuating principles; and to do this is to understand universals. Thus, there is no incompatibility between the fact that universals do not subsist outside the soul, and that in understanding universals the intellect understands things that do exist outside the soul.[307]

In earlier works Aquinas' doctrine is the same. Despite the difference in the mode of being of the known and the mediation of the species, intelligence is able to reach *directly* to

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"Hence this 'proper object' of our intellect is not, as the Platonists held, something existing, outside sensible things; it is something intrinsic to sensible things; and this, *even though the mode in which essences are grasped by the mind differs from their mode of existence in sensible things*; for the mind discerns them apart from the individuating conditions which belong to them in the order of sensible reality." [*Illud, quod est obiectum intellectus nostri non est aliquid extra res sensibiles existens, ut Platonici posuerunt, sed aliquid in rebus sensibilibus existens;* licet intellectus apprehendat alio modo quidditates rerum, quam sint in rebus sensibilibus. *Non enim apprehendit eas cum conditionibus individuantibus, quae eis in rebus sensibilibus adiunguntur.*]

[307] *CG II*, 75, par. 8: "Nec tamen oportet quod, quia scientiae sunt de universalibus, quod universalia sint extra animam per se subsistentia: sicut Plato posuit. Quamvis enim ad veritatem cognitionis necesse sit ut cognitio rei respondeat, *non tamen oportet ut idem sit modus cognitionis et rei*. Quae enim coniuncta sunt in re, interdum divisim cognoscuntur: simul enim una res est et alba et dulcis; visus tamen cognoscit solam albedinem, et gustus solam dulcedinem […] Similiter autem, licet natura generis et speciei nunquam sit nisi in his individuis, intelligit tamen intellectus naturam speciei et generis non intelligendo principia individuantia: et hoc est intelligere universalia. Et sic haec duo non repugnant, quod universalia non subsistant extra animam: et quod intellectus, intelligens universalia, intelligat res quae sunt extra animam."

the thing itself.[308] The content, the object understood, is distinguished from its mode of being:

> Corporeal creatures are not said to be immediately seen, unless that which in them is able to be united to sight is actually united. Now, they are not able to be united through their own essence because of their materiality. Thus, they are immediately seen when their representations are united to the intellect […] Moreover, the representation of a corporeal thing is received in sight with the same content it has in that thing, even though the mode of being is not the same; and for this reason, this representation leads directly to the thing itself.[309] (my trans.)

> Therefore, these notions thus abstracted can be considered in two ways. The first one is to consider them in themselves. In this way, they are considered without movement and designated matter: this is found in the aforementioned notions only with regard to the being that they have in the intellect. The other way is to consider them with regard to the things of which they are notions, things that certainly subsist in matter and movement. And in this way these notions are principles of knowledge of those things, because every thing is known by means of its form. Thus, by means of these notions, immobile and considered without particular matter, we have knowledge (in natural science) of mobile and material things which exist outside the soul.[310] (my trans.)

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[308] Cf. *De Ver* 2, 3, ad 3: "For to be directed to the likeness of a thing is the same as to be directed to the thing which is known through this likeness." [... idem est ei ferri in similitudinem rei, et in rem quae per talem similitudinem cognoscitur.]

[309] *In IV Sent*., d. 49, q. 2, a.1 ad 16: "[C]reaturae corporales non dicuntur immediate videri, nisi quando id quod in eis est conjungibile visui, ei conjungitur: non sunt autem conjungibiles per essentiam suam ratione materialitatis; et ideo tunc *immediate videntur quando eorum similitudo intellectui conjungitur* […] Et praeterea similitudo rei corporalis recipitur in visu secundum eamdem rationem qua est in re, *licet non secundum eumdem modum essendi*; *et ideo similitudo illa ducit in illam rem directe*." In this text we can also see the comparison of intelligence with sensitivity (cf. *Chapter 3*, section 5), to the point that St. Thomas uses "vision" to speak about the intellectual act of understanding. This text is partially quoted in Stump, 246 note 5 (on page 527).

[310] *In Boet. De Trin*. 5, 2, c.: "Possunt ergo huiusmodi *rationes sic abstractae* considerari dupliciter. Uno modo secundum se, et sic considerantur sine motu et materia signata, et hoc non invenitur in eis nisi *secundum esse quod habent in intellectu*. Alio modo *secundum quod comparantur ad res*, quarum sunt rationes; quae quidem res sunt in materia et motu. Et sic sunt principia cognoscendi illa, quia omnis res cognoscitur per suam formam. Et ita per huiusmodi rationes immobiles et sine materia particulari consideratas habetur cognitio in scientia naturali de rebus mobilibus et materialibus extra animam exsistentibus."

"The forms in our intellects, however, are received from things. Hence, they do not excel things, and are, as it were, equal to them as far as representation goes, even though they may excel them in mode of being because their [being] is immaterial."[311]

3) The Two Meanings of Universal

There are some texts in which St. Thomas speaks about two meanings of "universal" and two meanings of "intelligible," as we have somewhat anticipated.[312] This distinguishing of two meanings relates to the main point of this *Chapter*, because one of the meanings of "universal" is related to the content, and the other one is related to the mode of being of the content in the mind. This distinction makes us more careful in how we interpret St. Thomas where he says that the agent intellect "makes the intelligible"; what is being proposed in this dissertation is that the agent intellect "makes the intelligible" insofar as it produces the intelligible mode of being of the intelligible content, and not insofar as it produces the intelligible content. In other words, the agent intellect's action refers to one of

[311] *De Ver.* 8, 10 ad 3: "Sed formae intellectus nostri accipiuntur ex rebus; unde non sunt superexcedentes rebus sed quasi adequatae quantum ad repraesentationem, licet sint excedentes quantum ad modum essendi in quantum habent esse immateriale." Stump brings other texts from *De Ver* (her translation) where we can see this distinction between the object and its mode of being in the cognizer: "the similitude of two things to one another can be grounded in two [different] ways. In one way, insofar as there is sharing of a nature (*convenientia in natura*), and such a similitude is not needed between a cognizer and what is cognized. In another way, according to representation, and this [sort of] similitude is needed on the part of a cognizer with respect to what is cognized. *QDV* 2.3 ad 9" (Stump, 255 note 48); "a similitude existing in a cognitive power is not a source of the cognition of an [extramental] thing in accordance with the being which the similitude has in the cognitive power, but in accordance with the relationship which the similitude has to the cognized thing. And for this reason an [extramental] thing is cognized not by means of the mode in which the similitude has being in the one cognizing, but rather by means of the mode in which the similitude existing in the intellect is representative of that thing. *QDV* 2.5 ad 17" (Stump, 272 note 119).

[312] Cf. 85, 2 ad 2, studied in section 2 of this *Chapter*.

the meanings of universal, but not to the other. Let us begin by seeing this distinction in some texts of the *Summa*, and then, in other works of Aquinas.

3.1. In the *Summa*

Let us examine the passage of 85, 3 ad 4. Note here how the word "universale" has a meaning which includes connotations *both* gnoseological and natural (or metaphysical). The first connotation analyzed is the gnoseological one: "The universal, as understood with the intention of universality, is, indeed, in a way, a principle of knowledge, in so far as the intention of universality results from the mode of understanding by way of abstraction."[313] "Universale" is a notion that *may* imply a mode of being which depends on our understanding: as we can see, the difference between *res intellecta* and *modus rei intellectae* is already suggested. In the objection it is argued that, because the universals are certain principles, they are known posteriorly by their effects. The confusion is between the principles of being and the principles of knowing, and here St. Thomas clarifies: "But what is a principle of knowledge is not of necessity a principle of existence, as Plato thought: since at times we know a cause through its effect, and substance through accidents."[314] Aquinas' criticism of Plato is the same as in 84, 1, c., as the notes of the Ottawa edition suggest. "Wherefore the universal thus considered, according to the opinion of Aristotle, is neither a

[313] 85, 3 ad 4: "Universale, secundum quod accipitur cum intentione universalitatis, est quidem quodammodo principium cognoscendi, prout intentio universalitatis consequitur modum intelligendi qui est per abstractionem."

[314] 85, 3 ad 4: "Non autem est necesse quod omne quod est principium cognoscendi, sit principium essendi, ut Plato existimavit, cum quandoque cognoscamus causam per effectum, et substantiam per accidentia."

principle of existence, nor a substance, as he makes clear (Metaph. vii)."[315] "*Universale sic acceptum*" is again a clear indication of the possibility of employing the term "universal" in a different way, as Aquinas illustrates immediately in our passage: "But if we consider the generic or specific nature itself as existing in the singular, thus in a way it is in the nature of a formal principle in regard to the singulars."[316] St. Thomas, then, is showing the distinction between the universals as principles of knowing and as principles of being, because the two meanings of universal are confused in the objection. What is important for our purposes is that, for Aquinas, there is such a thing as a universal *in re* (the *natura prout est in singularibus*), which is not to be confounded with the universal *cum intentione universalitatis*; but at the same time, the difference is between modes of being of the same: "*intentio universalitatis consequitur modum intelligendi qui est per abstractionem*."

The two different modes of being of the universal are already distinguished in the answer to the first objection:[317] "The universal can be considered in two ways. First, the universal nature may be considered together with the intention of universality […] Secondly, the universal can be considered [regarding] the nature itself—for instance, animality or humanity, [insofar as it exists] in the individual."[318] In the section omitted, St. Thomas explains what he means by *intentio universalitatis*, a notion used in both *Ad unum* and *Ad*

[315] 85, 3 ad 4: "Unde universale sic acceptum, secundum sententiam Aristotelis, non est principium essendi, neque substantia, ut patet in VII Metaphys."

[316] 85, 3 ad 4: "Si autem consideremus ipsam naturam generis et speciei prout est in singularibus, sic quodammodo habet rationem principii formalis respectu singularium."

[317] 85, 3 ad 1.

[318] 85, 3 ad 1: "Universale dupliciter potest considerari. Uno modo, secundum quod natura universalis consideratur simul cum intentione universalitatis […] Alio modo potest considerari quantum ad ipsam naturam, scilicet animalitatis vel humanitatis, prout invenitur in particularibus."

quartum: "And since the intention of universality—viz. the relation of one and the same to many—is due to intellectual abstraction, the universal thus considered is a secondary consideration. Hence it is said (De Anima i, 1) that the 'universal animal is either nothing or something secondary'."[319] When Aquinas says "*intentio universalitatis,"* "*intentio"* is "reference to," "relation towards," in the sense that the one meaning is referred to the many particulars. Now, in what sense does St. Thomas say that the universal is posterior and, with Aristotle, either nothing or posterior? Aquinas certainly does not mean to deny that there is something common in the particulars; he affirms this a few lines later, as we have already seen. What he means is that one and the same thing (*unum et idem*) as referred to the many, is not in reality as such (because every individual thing actually has its own nature as an intrinsic principle, though only numerically different) but follows the process of abstraction; abstraction *produces* this one thing (the intelligible in act) which refers to the many, *from* the knowledge of the many (the realm of the particular); it is in this sense that the universal is posterior. This is also related to what he means by *intentio universalitatis*: he means the reference of the universal *as known* to the particulars from which it is abstracted. The universal as known (in the state of abstraction) is one as *one thing* (*unum et idem*), as one unique principle of knowing the many. But this does not deny that the universal subsists as something *common* in the particulars, one as *formally or specifically* one, which is the nature of the different individuals of the same species ("*ipsam naturam, scilicet animalitatis vel humanitatis, prout invenitur in particularibus*"). In the

[319] 85, 3 ad 1: "Et cum intentio universalitatis, ut scilicet unum et idem habeat habitudinem ad multa, proveniat ex abstractione intellectus, oportet quod secundum hunc modum universale sit posterius. Unde in *I De Anima* dicitur quod animal universale aut nihil est, aut posterius est."

conclusion of this passage, Aquinas underlines once more the difference between his view and Plato's: "But according to Plato, who held that universals are subsistent, the universal considered thus would be prior to the particular, for the latter, according to him, are mere participations of the subsistent universals which he called ideas."[320] Again, Plato's universal idea and St. Thomas' universal nature *prout invenitur in particularibus* are both *real*. In Plato, however, the idea subsists in reality *cum intentione universalitatis*, i.e., as one thing (*unum et idem*) referred to the many, as happens in the intellect. For St. Thomas, instead, it is not necessary that what is known have in reality the same mode of being as it has in the intellect**.**

3.2. Two Meanings of "Universal" in other Works of Aquinas.

Consider *In I De Anima* 1, 215-230, St. Thomas' examination of the Aristotelian "*animal autem universale, aut nihil est, aut posterius*." Aquinas' explanation follows by distinguishing, not two, but three possible meanings of universal. A numbering system has been inserted into the following text in order to make more clear the remarks about it which come after:

> We must understand that one can speak of a 'universal animal' in two ways: either **(1)** as universal, i.e. as one nature existing in, or predicated of, many individuals; or **(2)** as animal. [As universal, again, it] can be regarded either **(1A)** in relation to existence in the real world or **(1B)** as existing in the mind. As regards existence in the real world, Plato held that the universal animal did so exist **(**i.e., **1A)** and existed prior to particular animals; because, as has been said, he thought that there were universals and ideas with an independent existence. Aristotle, however, said that the

[320] 85, 3 ad 1: "Sed secundum Platonem, qui posuit universalia subsistentia, secundum hanc considerationem [that is, the universal cum intentione universalitatis] universale esset prius quam particularia, quae secundum eum non sunt nisi per participationem universalium subsistentium, quae dicuntur ideae."

> universal as such had no [existence in the real world], and that if it was anything at all it came after the individual thing **(**i.e., **1B)**. But if we regard the nature of animals from a different point of view, i.e. not as a universal **(**i.e., **2)**, then it is indeed something real [and prior,] as the potential precedes the actual.[321]

As it appears, (1) and (2) correspond to the division of 85, 3 ad 1 y ad 4 (universal regarded as nature or as the abstracted mode of being of that nature) and the further division (1A and 1B) is actually the doctrinal division between Plato and Aristotle (the universal subsists *in rerum natura* for Plato, and for Aristotle only in the intellect *after* the process of abstraction, and because of this "posterius"). But the universal as nature (2) is first, precisely because the nature as abstracted comes from it; that is, the nature of the animal is in potency of becoming universal in the second sense (1B). In this text, then, the nature in the thing itself is called universal *in one sense*, and in potency of being universal *in a second sense*.

In the following text, also from *In De Anima*, the division is the usual. Notice the *duplex esse* attributed to the nature (the two modes of being under discussion):

> Note that the term 'universal' can be taken in two senses. It can refer to the nature itself, common to several things, in so far as this common nature is regarded in relation to those several things; or it can refer to the nature taken simply in itself. […] Now a nature—say, human nature,—which can be thought of universally, has two modes of existence: one, material, in the matter supplied by nature; the other, immaterial, in the intellect. […] Nevertheless, there is no deception when the mind apprehends a common nature apart from its individuating principles; for in this

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[321] *In I De Anima* 1, 215-230: "Sciendum est, quod de animali universali possumus loqui dupliciter, quia *aut* **(1)** secundum quod est universale (quod scilicet est unum in multis aut de multis), *aut* **(2)** secundum quod est animal; [si secundum quod est] universale, *et hoc vel* **(1A)** secundum quod est in rerum natura, *vel* **(1B)** secundum quod est in intellectu. Secundum autem quod est in rerum natura, Plato voluit animal universale aliquid esse **(**i.e., **1A)** et esse prius particulari, quia, ut dictum est, posuit universalia separata et ydeas; Aristotiles autem, quod nichil est in rerum natura; et si aliquid est, dixit illud esse posterius **(**i.e., **1B)**. Si autem accipiamus naturam animalis non secundum quod subiacet intentioni universalitatis **(**i.e., **2)**, sic aliquid est et prius, sicut quod in potentia prius est quam illud quod est in actu."

> apprehension the mind does not judge that the nature exists apart; it merely apprehends this nature without apprehending the individuating principles […]. For the truth of our conceptions does not require that, merely apprehending anything, we apprehend everything in it. […] It is clear, then, that universality can be predicated of a common nature only in so far as it exists in the mind: for a unity to be predicable of many things it must first be conceived apart from the principles by which it is divided into many things. Universals as such exist only in the soul; but the natures themselves, which are conceivable universally, exist in things.[322]

Although Aquinas seems to prefer the word "universal" for the nature *in its state of abstraction*, it is important to note the reason for his allowing also the nature in the thing itself to be called "universal." He refers this word more to the abstracted nature, because it is only in this sense that a truly *one* (with a *real* unity) is said of the many. However, the reason he calls also the nature in itself "universal" is that he wants to explain the objectivity of knowing; that is, the reason there is only *one* form in the intellect, is that there is really a *common* perfection in the things themselves, which is *formally* one. In this way, St. Thomas safeguards the correspondence of the mind to the things themselves.[323]

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[322] *In II De Anima* 12, 95-147: "Considerandum est, quod universale potest accipi dupliciter. Uno modo potest dici universale ipsa natura communis, prout subiacet intentioni universalitatis. Alio modo secundum se. […] Ista autem natura, cui advenit intentio universalitatis, puta natura hominis, habet duplex esse: unum quidem materiale, secundum quod est in materia naturali; aliud autem immateriale, secundum quod est in intellectu […] Nec tamen intellectus est falsus, dum apprehendit naturam communem praeter principia individuantia, sine quibus esse non potest in rerum natura. Non enim apprehendit hoc intellectus, scilicet quod natura communis sit sine principiis individuantibus; sed apprehendit naturam communem non apprehendendo principia individuantia […] Non enim exigitur ad veritatem apprehensionis quod qui apprehendit rem aliquam, apprehendat omnia quae insunt ei. […] Sic igitur patet, quod naturae communi non potest attribui intentio universalitatis nisi secundum esse quod habet in intellectu: sic enim solum est unum de multis, prout intelligitur praeter principia, quibus unum in multa dividitur. Unde relinquitur, quod universalia, secundum quod sunt universalia, non sunt nisi in anima. Ipsae autem naturae, quibus accidit intentio universalitatis, sunt in rebus."

[323] The distinction of the two meanings of universal is also found in *In Met*. 7, lect. 13, 1570ff.: "For the clarification of this chapter it must be noted that the term universal can be taken in two senses. First, it can be taken to mean the nature of the thing to which the intellect attributes the aspect of universality, and in this sense universals such as genera and species signify the substances of things inasmuch as they are predicated quidditatively; for animal signifies the

In the following text, Aquinas prefers to use "universal" for the content, and "intelligible" for the mode of being. The universal is something in the things themselves, something needing to be separated from matter because it enters into composition with matter. This separation from matter makes the universal intelligible:

> Scientific knowledge is only about universals. But God is not a universal, for every universal is had by abstraction. There can be no abstraction from God, however, since He is perfectly simple. Hence, God does not know Himself. […] A universal is intelligible in direct proportion to its separation from matter. Hence, those things which have not been separated from matter by an act of our intellect but are, in themselves, free from all matter, are most knowable. Consequently, God is most knowable, even though He is not a universal.[324]

The two meanings of "universal" "and "intelligible" are at play in other texts, even though the distinction is not explicit. In the following text, the angelic infused species are called "intelligible" (an indication of their mode of being) and are the means to understand not only the separate substances but also the species of corporeal things. These species are also called "intelligible" (as content):

> Thus, through the intelligible forms in question a separate substance knows not only other separate substances, but also the species of corporeal things. For their intellect, being wholly in act, is perfect in point of natural perfection, and, therefore, it must comprehend its object—intelligible being—in a universal manner. Now, the

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substance of the thing of which it is predicated, and so also does man. Second, a universal can be taken insofar as it is universal, and insofar as the nature predicated of a thing falls under the aspect of universality." [Sciendum est autem, *ad evidentiam huius capituli*, quod universale dupliciter potest accipi. Uno modo *pro ipsa natura*, cui intellectus attribuit intentionem universalitatis: et sic universalia, ut genera et species, substantias rerum significant, ut praedicantur *in quid*. Animal enim significat substantiam eius, de quo praedicatur, et homo similiter. Alio modo potest accipi universale inquantum est universale, et *secundum quod natura praedicta subest intentioni universalitatis.*]

[324] *De Ver.* 2, 2, ob. 4 and ad 4: "[S]cientia non est nisi de universali. Sed Deus non est universale: quia universale omne est per abstractionem; a Deo autem, cum sit simplicissimus, non potest fieri abstractio. Ergo Deus non cognoscit seipsum […] Universale pro tanto est intelligibile, quia est a materia separatum; unde illa quae non sunt per actum intellectus nostri a materia separata, sed per seipsa sunt ab omni materia libera, maxime cognoscibilia sunt; et sic Deus maxime intelligibilis est, quamvis non sit universale." Cf. *Q.D. De Anima*, a.2, ad 5 (text in *Appendix*, Note 8).

> species of corporeal things are also included within intelligible being, and the separate substance, therefore, knows them.[325]

What is noteworthy is that the intelligibility of the species (= natures) of material things is affirmed and, affirmed also, is the intelligibility of the species (= subjective representation) by which we know those natures. One and the same word, "intelligible", is being used in two different ways.

"And similarly it would not be necessary to posit an agent intellect if the universals which are actually intelligible subsisted of themselves outside the soul, as Plato asserted. But because Aristotle asserted that these universals do not subsist except in sensible objects, which are not actually intelligible…" etc.,[326] where it is clear that a *universal* (*in re*) is not *intelligible* in act. The text of the *Ad Sextum*, besides showing this distinction at play, illustrates several points made thus far in this thesis, as well as pointing out the alterity of the object (which will be treated subsequently in more detail):

> For there is no difference between Aristotle and Plato, except in this: that Plato asserted that the thing which is understood has actual being outside the soul in exactly the same way as the intellect understands it, that is, as something abstract and universal; but Aristotle asserted that the thing which is understood is outside the soul, but in another way, because it is understood in the abstract and has actual being in the concrete. And just as, according to Plato, the thing itself which is understood is outside the soul itself, so it is according to Aristotle: and this is clear from the fact that neither of them asserted that the sciences have to do with those things which are in our intellect, as with substances; but whereas Plato said that the sciences have to do with separated forms, Aristotle said that they have to do with

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[325] *CG II*, 99, par. 1-2: "Per dictas igitur formas *intelligibiles* substantia separata non solum cognoscit alias substantias separatas, sed etiam species rerum corporalium. Cum enim intellectus earum sit perfectus naturali perfectione, utpote totus in actu existens, oportet quod suum obiectum, scilicet ens intelligibile, universaliter comprehendat. Sub ente autem *intelligibili* comprehenduntur etiam species rerum corporalium. Eas igitur substantia separata cognoscit."

[326] *De Spirit. Creat*., a.9, c.: "Et similiter non esset necesse ponere intellectum agentem, si universalia quae sunt intelligibilia actu, per se subsisterent extra animam, sicut posuit Plato. Sed quia Aristoteles posuit ea non subsistere nisi in sensibilibus, quae non sunt intelligibilia actu…"

> the quiddities of things that exist in those things. But the character of universality, which consists in commonness and abstractness, is merely the result of the mode of understanding, inasmuch as we understand things abstractly and universally; but according to Plato it is also the result of the mode of existence of the abstract forms: and consequently Plato asserted that universals subsist, whereas Aristotle did not.[327]

The difference between Plato and Aristotle is not a difference between knowing by confrontation and knowing by identity: for both of them what is known is the universal, and it is outside the soul. The difference is between the modes of being attributed by each to the object of human understanding. The originality of Aristotle, at least in Aquinas' interpretation, is in establishing the difference between *res intellecta* and *modus rei intellectae*.

Some texts may give the impression that, for Aquinas, the universal does not exist in any way in the things themselves. Let us examine one such text. Its context is an apparent contradiction in Aristotle. That is, Aristotle begins by saying that the *quod quid erat esse* and the thing to which it belongs are one and the same thing, without excluding material substances; but then he excludes them, saying that only in separate substances does the species coincide with the individual. Why does Aristotle not previously exclude the material substances? St. Thomas explains that this is because of a different consideration of the

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[327] *De Spirit. Creat.*, a.9, ad 6: "Non enim est differentia inter Aristotelem et Platonem, nisi in hoc quod Plato posuit quod res quae intelligitur *eodem modo habet esse extra animam quo modo eam intellectus intelligit*, idest ut abstracta et communis; Aristoteles vero posuit rem quae intelligitur esse extra animam, *sed alio modo*, quia intelligitur abstracte et habet esse concrete. Et sicut secundum Platonem ipsa res quae intelligitur est extra ipsam animam, *ita secundum Aristotelem*: quod patet ex hoc quod neuter eorum posuit scientias esse de his quae sunt in intellectu nostro, sicut de substantiis; sed Plato quidem dixit scientias esse de formis separatis, Aristoteles vero de quidditatibus rerum in eis existentibus. Sed *ratio universalitatis, quae consistit in communitate et abstractione, sequitur solum modum intelligendi*, in quantum intelligimus abstracte et communiter; *secundum Platonem vero sequitur etiam modum existendi* formarum abstractarum: et ideo Plato posuit universalia subsistere, Aristoteles autem non."

nature of material things: when the nature is considered *in its state of abstraction*, then it is also only one for each species, as happens with the separate substances. The text says:

> Now even though man does not exist apart from singular men in reality, nevertheless man is separable in his intelligible expression, which pertains to the domain of logic. Therefore, above, where he considered essence from the viewpoint of logic, he did not exclude material substances from being their own essence; for man as a universal is the same as his essence, logically speaking. And now having come to natural principles, which are matter and form…[328]

Now, because it is considered *in its reality*, the nature cannot be said to be one and the same thing with that to which it belongs; in each thing, *together with the common nature*, there are also individuating principles. As it seems clear, the text is saying that the universal is not in reality *in its state of abstraction*, but the same text is implying that the species is in reality together with the individuating principles.[329]

4) The Distinction between "*ex parte rei intellectae*" and "*ex parte intelligentis*"

For St. Thomas, the difference between the *res intellecta* and the *modus rei intellectae* can be seen also in a group of texts referring to the distinction (regarding the act of understanding) between what belongs to it *ex parte rei intellectae* and *ex parte intelligentis*. Let us see, for example, 85, 1 ad 1:

> If, therefore, the intellect is said to be false when it understands a thing otherwise than as it is, that is so, if the word 'otherwise' refers to the thing understood; for the

[328] *In Met*. 7, lect. 11, 1536: "Licet autem *homo praeter singularia non sit in rerum natura*, est tamen in ratione quae pertinet ad logicam considerationem. Et ideo superius ubi logice consideravit de quod quid erat esse, non exclusit substantias materiales, quin in illis etiam esset idem quod quid est, cum eo cuius est. Homo enim communis est idem cum suo quod quid est, logice loquendo. Nunc autem postquam iam descendit ad principia naturalia quae sunt materia et forma..."

[329] Cf. for example *In Met.* 7, lect. 11, 1535.

> intellect is false when it understands a thing otherwise than as it is; and so the intellect would be false if it abstracted the species of a stone from its matter in such a way as to regard the species as not existing in matter, as Plato held. But it is not so, if the word "otherwise" be taken as referring to the one who understands. For it is quite true that the mode of understanding, in one who understands, is not the same as the mode of a thing in existing: since the thing understood is immaterially in the one who understands, according to the mode of the intellect, and not materially, according to the mode of a material thing.[330]

5) Concluding Remarks

For St. Thomas, Plato's error is his denying the universal nature of corporeal things a subsistence in the matter. Kant makes the same error. The reason Plato makes this mistake is that he fails to distinguish the *res intellecta* from the *modus rei intellectae* or, in other words, he supposes that the object of knowledge must subsist in reality with the same

[330] 85, 1 ad 1: "Cum ergo dicitur quod intellectus est falsus qui intelligit rem aliter quam sit, verum est si ly aliter referatur ad rem intellectam. Tunc enim intellectus est falsus, quando intelligit rem esse aliter quam sit. Unde falsus esset intellectus, si sic abstraheret speciem lapidis a materia, ut intelligeret eam non esse in materia, ut Plato posuit. Non est autem verum quod proponitur, si ly aliter accipiatur ex parte intelligentis. Est enim absque falsitate ut alius sit modus intelligentis in intelligendo, quam modus rei in existendo, quia intellectum est in intelligente immaterialiter, per modum intellectus; non autem materialiter, per modum rei materialis." Cf. 85, 7, c.; *De Ver* 2, 2, ad 9; *De Spirit. Creat*., a.10, ad 12: "There is one essence of numbers in all minds, just as there is also one essence of a stone; and this essence is one on the part of the thing that is understood, but not on the part of the act of understanding, which is not essential to the thing that is understood; for it is not essential to a stone that it be understood." [Sic est una ratio numerorum in omnibus mentibus, sicut et una ratio lapidis; quae quidem est una *ex parte rei intellectae*, non autem *ex parte actus intelligendi*, quod non est de ratione rei intellectae: *non enim est de ratione lapidis quod intelligatur*.]; *De Spirit. Creat*., a.9, ad 6; *In Boet. De Trin*. 5, 1, c.: "Something belongs to the object of speculation, which is object of the speculative potency, with regard to the intellectual potency and something else belongs to it with regard to the habit of science by which the intellect is perfected. What belongs to the object of speculation with regard to the intellect is its being immaterial, because the intellect itself is immaterial. What belongs to this object with regard to science is its being necessary, because science is of the necessary, as it is demonstrated in I Posteriorum." [Speculabili autem, quod est obiectum speculativae potentiae, aliquid competit ex parte intellectivae potentiae et aliquid ex parte habitus scientiae quo intellectus perficitur. Ex parte siquidem intellectus competit ei quod sit immateriale, quia et ipse intellectus immaterialis est; ex parte vero scientiae competit ei quod sit necessarium, quia scientia de necessariis est, ut probatur in *I Posteriorum*.]

mode of being as it does in the intellect. This is also what Kant does. Of Plato, Aquinas says: "The Platonists posited Ideas chiefly in order that they might apply them both to definitions and demonstrations, which have to do with what is necessary, since all these sensible substances seemed to be in motion."[331]

It might be said that the speculative genius of Plato and Kant is combined with a no less surprising intellectual "adolescence." Their genius is seen in their safeguarding the rights of intellect over sensibility; like Parmenides, they cannot give up the life of the spirit, they do not want to surrender to the torrent of everchanging reality. At the same time, however, they cannot overcome the appearances; they cannot see in reality other than change, because they cannot overcome the data of sensibility. The data of sensibility cause them anxiety, as a storm causes children to be afraid. They escape the storm only to find refuge in themselves; they create a world of categories where everything corresponds to their conceptions, where everything seems safe . . . and Kant (if not Plato as well) engendered for Western culture a life without real adventure: the a priori world.

It is not a matter of giving life to the spirit out of a desire for adventure: instead, it is a true Phenomenology of perception which will help Epistemology to mature and to overcome Kantian biases. Fabro devotes much of his research to this issue.[332] Neither is it a matter of denying the depth of Plato and Kant, these two "Aristocrats of the Spirit"; which other thinkers have managed, as have they, to inspire so many philosophers and

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[331] *In Met.* 7, lect. 15, 1606: "Platonici ad hoc praecipue ponebant ideas, ut eis adaptarentur et definitiones et demonstrationes, quae sunt de necessariis, cum ista sensibilia videantur omnia in motu consistere."

[332] Particularly his *La Fenomenologia della Percezione* and *Percezione e Pensiero* (cf. Bibliography).

theologians after them? The thrust of the Spirit is fascinating . . . But the weaknesses in Plato and Kant must be recognized in order not to confound inspiration with the finished work of a solid system. Evidently, St. Thomas' certainty that the universal belongs to the thing, and is not a product of subjectivity, is rooted in his unchanging consideration of knowledge as being defined by alterity, knowledge as an encounter with the other. This is one of the points in *Chapter 3*.

It should be noted, however, that the express purpose of this dissertation is to understand the role of the agent intellect in the act of understanding for Aquinas. The necessity of drawing the comparison with Kant (through Plato) is to show that the efficiency of the agent intellect, for Aquinas, is not "formal," as productive of the universal nature as content of knowledge (*res intellecta*), but "metaphysic" as *productive of a mode of being* of the universal nature that is the object of understanding.[333]

If our reflections so far have not missed the point, it is clear that the nature (or better *quidditas*) of corporeal things, which is the *res intellecta* or the proper object of human understanding, admits two different modes of being: its subsistence in the particular, *materialiter*; and its presence in the intellect, *cum intentione universalitatis* and

[333] Germaine Cromp (+1990) exemplifies how, when the distinction between the two meanings of "intelligibility" is not made, the agent intellect necessarily becomes a formal a priori (cf. Cromp, 204, 167-168, 192, 201, 206-208). She suggests that the content comes in a sense from the phantasm (cf. 200), and raises three times the question of how this is possible (cf. 167, 180, 192); but because she does not distinguish the intelligible content from an added mode of being of the phantasm by the agent intellect, she does not escape from making the agent intellect responsible for the intelligible content.

in a state of abstraction.[334] The agent intellect is required because the mode of being of the natures in the matter is not proportionate to the intellectual faculty. The agent intellect is brought into play to produce intelligibility as a mode of being, and not intelligibility as content (*res intellecta*).[335] The distinction of these two meanings of universal and intelligible in Aquinas is explicit, as has been argued. As will be shown, the agent intellect for Aquinas is required to separate the *res intellecta* (or *intelligenda*) from its individual conditions in the matter, not to complete the matter with an intelligible unity that would not otherwise be there.

What still needs to be shown in more detail is that intellectual knowing, for Aquinas, is originally verified by the reception of this abstracted *quidditas*. Having brought to the fore the crucial distinction between that which is understood and its mode of being (and the related distinction between the two meanings of universal), it now becomes possible to better understand what Aquinas means when he speaks about receptivity, alterity and

[334] Lambert seems to be well oriented when he says: "Human abstracted concepts are identical in content to things in the real physical order and in that respect are never more than the equal of things; their superiority lies exclusively in their function as "re-presentation" of those things in an immaterial mode" (Lambert, 98). Though well oriented also in many other respects, he does not seem to manage to distinguish between the two meanings of intelligibility, considering intelligibility solely as a real mode of being, as separation from matter. This prevents him from expressing clearly in what way material things can be intelligible (cf. 90-92, 99). He also seems to confuse immateriality, as referring to knowing in general, with *spiritual* immateriality, risking the exclusion of sensible knowing from its proper immateriality.

[335] This distinction could also prove helpful to overcome the worries of Juan F. Sellés (cf. Sellés, *EIA*, 256 nota 72). He acknowledges that, for St. Thomas, the agent intellect is cognitive only insofar as it concurs with the possible intellect, neither before nor apart from it. But in evident disagreement, he wonders "… how is it that something which is non-cognitive is able to subsequently generate knowledge in the possible intellect?" My suggestion would be that, because in the object of knowledge Aquinas distinguishes between its content and its mode of being, the agent intellect generates (= makes possible) knowledge insofar is it produces the intelligible mode of being of the content. "Intelligibility" is an analogous notion that does not refer only to the content of understanding, but also to its mode of being in the mind.

identity in human knowing. Briefly put: on the one hand, receptivity and alterity are referred to the *res intellecta*, insofar as what is received by the possible intellect is the perfection of the known (which for Aquinas is “other” in its real mode of being, subsisting in the matter) in an intelligible mode of being. On the other hand, identity is referred to this intelligible mode of being, insofar as the intellect in its operation is one and the same, not with the *res intellecta* (whose perfection receives intentionally and not physically) but with the species as subjective modification, i.e., with the species as perfecting subjectively the intellect. These matters will be treated in the next *Chapter*.

Chapter Three: Knowing as Receptive

A topic introduced in *Chapter 1* is the consideration of intelligence as a certain "vision." Thus arises a very important issue underlying the whole doctrine of the agent intellect in Aquinas; that is, intellectual knowing is originally receptive, intentional as possession of the other and even defined by alterity. In other words, to say that the agent intellect is a metaphysical a priori of intellectual knowing as receptive of objective content, implies that understanding is not a certain "perfecting" of something, but a "being perfected" by something; to understand is not to communicate a perfection, but to receive a perfection. Therefore, the agent intellect which is by definition something "perfecting," is not the faculty of understanding, but something required by the possible intellect in order to understand (and in that sense a priori). If we show that, for Aquinas, understanding is originally receptive of the perfection of the other as such, what becomes more clear is the questionability of any conception of the agent intellect as contributing the universal content of knowing or as completing formally the material of sensibility. If knowing is not performance[336] of the object but reception of the other, the agent intellect cannot be

[336] I use both "performative" and "productive" to refer to the formal a priori. The first term seems to have a more cognitive connotation, the second seems more "physical", and because "performative" has been used in other interpretations, a clarification is in order. I am not suggesting that a formal a priori is simply a physical activity of organization or a "putting together" a physical material element. What I mean to say is that, if 1) we consider the object of human science like a "composite" of matter and form (which is already a limited analogy from the physical order), 2) we consider the "matter" of this object that which comes from experience (particular in content), 3) we consider the "form" of this object the "unity" of universality which this material from experience finds in human mind, and 4) we consider that this unity of universality does not come from experience but from the human mind itself, because we take the universality of the content to be an event of consciousness and not a datum from experience, then 5) we maintain a formal a priori that

productive of the object, but productive only of the intelligible mode of being of the other.[337]

This central issue will be approached by attending to six groups of texts:

1. Passages in which the role of knowing in creation is characterized as a remedy for the specific imperfection of certain creatures.
2. Texts referring to alterity and identity in knowing, trying to establish in what sense Aquinas speaks of these things.
3. Texts showing how for Aquinas the identity in knowledge is based on the species[338] and is not an ontological identity with the known.
4. Texts in which knowing is presented as a certain "receiving," which reinforces the idea of alterity as a characteristic of knowing.
5. Texts showing the so frequent comparison between intelligence and sensitivity will be another confirmation of the alterity and receptivity of knowing.

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is "productive" of the intellectual object, insofar as universality, which is considered the "form" of the object, is a characteristic of the object coming from the mind. If the analogy, insofar as it comes from the physical order, does not manage to convey perfectly the reality of an epistemological formal a priori, it does allow to understand that, as in the physical realm whatever is perfect in a body comes from the agent cause and not from the matter, in a similar way, in the intentional realm, whatever is defined (determined) in the object comes from the subject, and not from experience.

[337] We suppose in this *Chapter* our previous findings, particularly that the object of understanding is the nature subsisting in the particular and not the particular as such. Therefore the other we are talking about is not just the material of sensibility.

[338] I mean species as subjective modification. In this sense, the species is not the known, but the means by which the known is present to the mind. Aquinas can also use "species" in the sense of nature or content of knowing. I will try to avoid confusions in my usage of this word.

6. Finally, as a corollary of the previous reflections, if knowing is neither a "tending towards" nor a "making," it means that there is, for Aquinas, a clear distinction between the agent intellect, the possible intellect and the will.

The rationale of this division will be more clear in what follows. It could be helpful to note however, on the doctrinal side, that the tension between identity and alterity, as has been anticipated in *Chapter 2*, will be resolved by referring identity to the species (and so to the mode of being of the known in the intellect), and alterity to the known perfection itself.

1) The Metaphysical Explanation of Knowing as a "Remedy"

For Aquinas, knowing is what allows certain creatures to remedy their natural imperfection, even to the point of obtaining a likeness of the supreme perfection of God. The reason for bringing this idea of "remedy" into our considerations is that it may help to establish knowing as a being perfected, rather than as a perfecting activity.

St. Thomas refers to this point previously, in *De Ver.* 2, 2, c. What is interesting about this passage is that it locates knowing as part of the universal plan of creation; it gives us, as it were, the reason for knowledge to exist.

> A thing is perfect in two ways. First, it is perfect with respect to the perfection of its [being], which belongs to it according to its own species. But, since the specific [being] of one thing is distinct from the specific [being] of another, in every created thing, [this kind of perfection in each thing] falls short of absolute perfection to the extent that that perfection is found in other species. Consequently, the perfection of each individual thing considered in itself is imperfect, being a part of the perfection

> of the entire universe, which arises from the sum total of the perfections of all individual things.[339]

The first mode of perfection can be called natural, physical or even "real" being. The second is intentional being, the being of the known in the knower. For St. Thomas, this second kind of possessing a perfection is a certain remedy for the original specific "imperfection" of creatures:

> In order that there might be some remedy for this imperfection, another kind of perfection is to be found in created things. It consists in this, that the perfection belonging to one thing is found in another. This is the perfection of a knower in so far as he knows; for something is known by a knower by reason of the fact that the thing known is, in some fashion, in the possession of the knower.[340]

Knowing, therefore, is what allows human beings to arrive at a certain "universal" perfection. And it should be stressed from the beginning that human beings do not already

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[339] *De Ver.* 2, 2, c.: "Res aliqua invenitur perfecta dupliciter. Uno modo secundum perfectionem sui esse, quod ei competit secundum propriam speciem. Sed quia esse specificum unius rei est distinctum ab esse specifico alterius rei, ideo in qualibet re creata huiusmodi perfectioni in unaquaque re tantum deest de perfectione simpliciter, quantum perfectionis in speciebus aliis invenitur; ut sic cuiuslibet rei perfectio in se consideratae sit imperfecta, veluti pars perfectionis totius universi, quae consurgit ex singularum rerum perfectionibus, invicem congregatis."

[340] *De Ver.* 2, 2, c.: "Unde ut huic imperfectioni aliquod remedium esset, invenitur alius modus perfectionis in rebus creatis, secundum quod perfectio quae est propria unius rei, in altera re invenitur; et haec est perfectio cognoscentis in quantum est cognoscens, quia secundum hoc a cognoscente aliquid cognoscitur quod ipsum cognitum est aliquo modo apud cognoscentem." Cf. *In I De Anima* 4, 18-26. In *Summa* I, 78, 3 c., St. Thomas distinguishes in the senses between natural and spiritual *immutatio*, where "spiritual" refers to this second mode of being. As Stump clarifies: "Aquinas tends to use 'immaterial', 'intentional', and 'spiritual' roughly synonymously to refer to this kind of change or reception of form" (Stump, 251, note 35, cf. note 36). Cf. *In I De Anima* 10, 191-195: "Here there is no movement of the material substance itself, but only a 'spiritual' movement of cognition: for example, the act of seeing is not a material modification; it is 'spiritual' reception into the eye of sensible forms." [In his enim non est motus secundum esse naturae, sed solum secundum esse spirituale, sicut patet in visu cuius operatio non est ad esse naturale, sed spirituale: quia est per species sensibiles secundum esse spirituale receptas in oculo.]

possess this universal perfection but, rather, this perfection is something to which human beings are in potency. This is the meaning of the Aristotelian "*quodammodo omnia*":

> Hence, it is said in *The Soul* that the soul is, 'in some manner, all things,' since its nature is such that it can know all things. In this way it is possible for the perfection of the entire universe to exist in one thing. The ultimate perfection which the soul can attain, therefore, is, according to the philosophers, to have delineated in it the entire order and causes of the universe. This they held to be the ultimate end of man; [which, in our view,] consists in the vision of God; for, as Gregory says: 'What is there that they do not see who see Him who sees all things?'[341]

According to St. Thomas, then, it is by means of knowledge that "*possibile est*" (not actual) that this universal perfection may exist in the soul; this perfection is "*ultima perfectio*" at which the soul may arrive, not something it possesses from the beginning. It is clear then, that knowing is something allowing a human being to arrive at his or her final perfection by an acquisition of the perfection of other things, such perfection being found in him or her with this second mode of being. Precisely because each creature *does not have* in itself the perfection of other creatures, this second mode of being provides some creatures with a "remedy" for this "imperfection"; knowing allows them to possess the perfection of others, so that a certain likeness to the first principle may be attained.

A similar text is found in 80, 1, c., where Aquinas is dealing with the necessity of attributing appetitive potencies to the human soul. He says: "For in those which lack knowledge, the form is found to determine each thing only to its own being—that is, to its

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[341] *De Ver*. 2, 2, c.: "Et ideo in *III De Anima* dicitur, anima esse quodammodo omnia, quia nata est omnia cognoscere. Et secundum hunc modum *possibile est* ut in una re totius universi perfectio existat. Unde haec est ultima perfectio ad quam anima potest *pervenire*, secundum philosophos, ut in ea describatur totus ordo universi, et causarum eius; in quo etiam finem ultimum hominis posuerunt, quod secundum nos, erit in visione Dei, quia secundum Gregorium, "quid est quod non videant qui videntem omnia vident?"

nature. Therefore this natural form is followed by a natural inclination, which is called the natural appetite."[342] This is the first mode of being considered previously in the text of *De Veritate*, the natural being. The second mode is introduced immediately:

> But in those things which have knowledge, each one is determined to its own natural being by its natural form, in such a manner that it is nevertheless receptive of the species of other things: for example, sense receives the species of all things sensible, and the intellect, of all things intelligible, so that the soul of man is, in a way, all things by sense and intellect: and thereby, those things that have knowledge, in a way, approach to a likeness to God, 'in Whom all things pre-exist,' as Dionysius says.[343]

We also have here the reference to the Aristotelian "*quodammodo omnia*" in the same sense; that is, those beings who are able to know are certainly determined in their specific being, but in such a way that they are also *able to receive* the perfection (here "*species*") of other beings. The word "*receptivum*" clearly expresses a passive potentiality; the word "*appropinquant*" also reminds us of the "*pervenire*" in *De Veritate*, in the sense that there is a progress towards an "*ultima perfectio*," which is here "*Dei similitudinem*." We should also note the contrast between human beings, who must "approach" the likeness of God, and God himself, in whom all things pre-exist, that is to say, in whom all of these perfections are already actually (virtually) present as in their first cause. In this text, knowing is the means by which human beings arrive at their ultimate perfection (distinct

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[342] 80, 1, c.: "In his enim quae cognitione carent, invenitur tantummodo forma ad unum esse proprium determinans unumquodque, quod etiam naturale uniuscuiusque est. Hanc igitur formam naturalem sequitur naturalis inclinatio, quae appetitus naturalis vocatur."

[343] 80, 1, c.: "In habentibus autem cognitionem, sic determinatur unumquodque ad proprium esse naturale per formam naturalem, quod tamen est receptivum specierum aliarum rerum, sicut sensus recipit species omnium sensibilium, et intellectus omnium intelligibilium, ut sic anima hominis sit omnia quodammodo secundum sensum et intellectum, in quo quodammodo cognitionem habentia ad Dei similitudinem appropinquant, in quo omnia praeexistunt, sicut Dionysius dicit."

from their natural initial perfection), that ultimate perfection being a certain likeness to God, in whom all things pre-exist.

The word "remedy" is also used in the *Summa* in a text that may illuminate this notion of knowing as a means of progress towards perfection. A human being is able to attain his or her ultimate perfection by means of many operations, according to his or her status in the scale of beings. Again, the difference between us and God is that, for God, this ultimate perfection is a possession, not something to be attained by operations. What is denied in God, however, is not the operation itself, but the "to be attained" element, which is proper to creatures. The metaphysical distinction between God and human beings illuminates what is created knowledge for St. Thomas, namely, a secondary perfection, the end or goal of the development of the knowing creature.

> Of necessity we must place several powers in the soul. To make this evident, we observe that, as the Philosopher says (*De Coelo* ii, 12), the lowest order of things cannot acquire perfect goodness, but they acquire a certain imperfect goodness, by few movements; and those which belong to a higher order acquire perfect goodness by many movements; and those yet higher acquire perfect goodness by few movements; and the highest perfection is found in those things which acquire perfect goodness without any movement whatever. Thus he is least of all disposed of health, who can only acquire imperfect health by means of a few remedies; better disposed is he who can acquire perfect health by means of many remedies; and better still, he who can by few remedies; best of all is he who has perfect health without any remedies. We conclude, therefore, that things which are below man acquire a certain limited goodness; and so they have a few determinate operations and powers. But man can acquire universal and perfect goodness, because he can acquire beatitude. Yet he is in the last degree, according to his nature, of those to whom beatitude is possible; therefore the human soul requires many and various operations and powers. But to angels a smaller variety of powers is sufficient. In God there is no power or action beyond His own Essence.[344]

[344] 77, 2, c.: "Necesse est ponere plures animae potentias. Ad cuius evidentiam, considerandum est quod, sicut Philosophus dicit in *II De Caelo*, quae sunt in rebus infima, non

In *De Veritate*, the "illness" seems to be more the relative imperfection of each creature regarding the perfection of the rest (and so a more "static" imperfection), and in the *Summa* the "illness" is the imperfection of the intellectual creature as a being in potency towards its final end (and so a dynamic imperfection). In the first two texts, St. Thomas refers to both sensible and intellectual knowledge, whereas in the third text he refers only to intellectual knowing; that is probably why he prefers to speak simply about *Dei similitudinem* in the second text and of *beatitudinem* in the third. In all three texts, finally, knowing in human beings is a being towards God, not a being-in-the-world; it is a means to obtain their final end by the gradual acquisition of perfections, and is not a perfecting activity of any kind.[345] In other words, knowing is a being towards God as an all-inclusive universal perfection; *quodammodo omnia* and *Dei similitudinem* refer more universally to the likeness of God, attainable also by sensible knowing or by purely natural knowledge; *visione Dei*, *universalem et perfectam bonitatem* instead are more restricted to the final end of intellectual creatures obtained only by grace.

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possunt consequi perfectam bonitatem, sed aliquam imperfectam consequuntur paucis motibus; superiora vero his adipiscuntur perfectam bonitatem motibus multis; his autem superiora sunt quae adipiscuntur perfectam bonitatem motibus paucis; summa vero perfectio invenitur in his quae absque motu perfectam possident bonitatem. Sicut infime est ad sanitatem dispositus qui non potest perfectam consequi sanitatem, sed aliquam modicam consequitur paucis remediis; melius autem dispositus est qui potest perfectam consequi sanitatem, sed remediis multis; et adhuc melius, qui remediis paucis; optime autem, qui absque remedio perfectam sanitatem habet. Dicendum est ergo quod res quae sunt infra hominem, quaedam particularia bona consequuntur, et ideo quasdam paucas et determinatas operationes habent et virtutes. Homo autem potest consequi universalem et perfectam bonitatem, quia potest adipisci beatitudinem. Est tamen in ultimo gradu, secundum naturam, eorum quibus competit beatitudo, et ideo multis et diversis operationibus et virtutibus indiget anima humana. Angelis vero minor diversitas potentiarum competit. In Deo vero non est aliqua potentia vel actio, praeter eius essentiam."

[345] The Heideggerian "being-in-the-world", in my view, is in direct opposition to Aquinas' view of human understanding.

The latter text[346] situates knowing in Aquinas' metaphysical world. For Aquinas, only God is His own being, and only in Him are being and operation the same. God is complete, perfect, possessing His own perfection. All other creatures need to obtain their final perfection by means of operations, which are secondary perfections added to a substantial primary perfection. What is one in the source is multiple in its effects. Every creature is a likeness of God, insofar as each has received from God a participation of God's goodness. But this original "fall"[347] from the source implies a distinction both at the static level of being (*essentia – esse*) and at the dynamic level (*esse substantialis – operatio*). If this second distinction did not take place, neither would the first make any sense: if a creature were perfect just because of what it is, it would mean that its essence and being would also be the same, and therefore it would not be a creature but God. This, I suggest, is the way to understand knowledge in Aquinas; that is, knowing is one of the operations allowing certain creatures to obtain their end, their secondary perfection. It is a remedy to their substantial imperfection, not an overflowing of their perfection onto other things.[348]

A connection with *Chapter 2* may be helpful at this point. Knowing is a remedy for the imperfection of the knower insofar as the perfection of the known does not belong specifically to the knower; we are, therefore, talking about the *res intellecta*. The fact that

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[346] 77, 2, c..

[347] In the sense that the creature "falls short of" the perfection of the Creator, and that the creature comes from the Creator as a certain "descending." In other words, the creature participates of the Creator in both a static sense (as a limited realization of the divine fullness of perfection) and a dynamic sense (as receiving his partial perfection from God). It is this being *per participationem* that is the reason for the different levels of composition in creatures.

[348] An image somewhat similar to that of "remedy" is the figure of "food." Cf. *In II De Anima* 6, 156-161 (See *Appendix*, Note 9).

the agent intellect "remedies" the lack of intelligibility of the object is not against the aforementioned because, in this case, "intelligibility" refers to the *modus rei intellectae*. The knower receives a perfection as content, whereas the real nature in the object (represented in the phantasm) receives a perfection as a mode of being.[349]

2) Alterity and Identity in Human Knowing

2.1. Alterity

In Aquinas, the original alterity of the object of knowing is clear. For example, in 75, 2, c.: "For it is clear that by means of the intellect man can have knowledge of [the natures of] all corporeal things. Now whatever knows certain things cannot have any of them in its own nature; because that which is in it naturally would impede the knowledge of anything else."[350] Precisely because to know is to receive the perfection of others, it is necessary that the faculty of knowing not be already perfected with a natural (and so "own") perfection of

[349] An interesting text in *In De Anima* also suggests that the "remedy" which human knowing is (here "salus") refers to receiving the perfection of the other as such (the "res intellecta"). This is related to the particular kind of receptivity that knowledge implies, which we will discuss later in section 4 of this same *Chapter*: "In another and looser sense the term (passio) connotes any reception of something from outside. And as a receiver is to what it receives as a potency to its actuality; and as actuality is the perfection of what is potential; so being acted upon (i.e., passio) in this sense implies, [not that a certain corruption takes place, but] rather that a certain ["salvation"] and perfection of a thing in potency is received from a thing in act." [Alio modo passio communiter dicitur et minus proprie, secundum scilicet quod importat *quamdam receptionem*. Et quia quod est receptivum *alterius*, comparatur ad ipsum sicut potentia ad actum: actus autem est perfectio potentiae; et ideo hoc modo dicitur passio, non secundum quod fit quaedam corruptio patientis, sed magis secundum quod *fit quaedam salus et perfectio eius quod est in potentia, ab eo quod est in actu.*] (*In II De Anima* 11, 109-117). Human knowing is this receiving the perfection of other things as a remedy for our original imperfection.

[350] 75, 2, c.: "Manifestum est enim quod homo per intellectum cognoscere potest naturas omnium corporum. Quod autem potest cognoscere aliqua, oportet ut nihil eorum habeat in sua natura, quia illud quod inesset ei naturaliter impediret cognitionem aliorum."

the same kind. Later, St. Thomas designates alterity as a commonality shared by sensibility and intelligence, despite the difference in each as regards the mode of being of the known:

> But there is this difference, according to the opinion of Aristotle, between the sense and the intelligence—that a thing is perceived by the sense according to the disposition which it has outside the soul—that is, in its individuality; whereas the nature of the thing understood is indeed outside the soul, but the mode according to which it exists outside the soul is not the mode according to which it is understood.[351]

What is known, the object, is "*extra animam*." In 84, 2, c. (a parallel of *De Ver.* 2, 2), in explaining the immateriality of knowing, St. Thomas says: "The reason of this is, because the act of knowledge extends to things outside the knower: for we know things even that are external to us."[352] The references to the exteriority of the known are clear also in 78, 1, c., already quoted. Referring to sensitive and intellectual potencies, he says: "… [T]he latter two genera of the soul's powers have an operation in regard not merely to that which is united to them, but also to something extrinsic."[353] Knowing is no doubt related to the thing "*extra animam*," although in a different way than are the affective potencies.[354]

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[351] 76, 2 ad 4: "Sed hoc tantum interest inter sensum et intellectum, secundum sententiam Aristotelis, quod res sentitur secundum illam dispositionem quam extra animam habet, in sua particularitate, natura autem rei quae intelligitur, est quidem extra animam, sed non habet illum modum essendi extra animam, secundum quem intelligitur." Cf. *De Spirit. Creat.*, a.9, ad 6 (quoted on p. 96).

[352] 84, 2, c.: "Et huius ratio est, quia actus cognitionis se extendit ad ea quae sunt extra cognoscentem, cognoscimus enim etiam ea quae extra nos sunt."

[353] 78, 1, c.: "… [I]sta duo secunda genera potentiarum animae habent operationem non solum respectu rei coniunctae, sed etiam respectu rei extrinsecae."

[354] Cf. 78, 1, c.: "It follows of necessity that this something extrinsic, which is the object of the soul's operation, must be related to the soul in a twofold manner. First, inasmuch as this something extrinsic has a natural aptitude to be united to the soul, and to be by its likeness in the soul. In this way there are two kinds of powers —namely, the "sensitive" […] and the "intellectual" […]. Secondly, forasmuch as the soul itself has an inclination and tendency to the something extrinsic." [Necesse est extrinsecam rem, quae est obiectum operationis animae, secundum duplicem rationem ad animam comparari. Uno modo, secundum quod nata est animae coniungi et

The reference to the external thing is direct, despite the mediation of the species, as we have already seen in 76, 2 ad 4. To say that "*lapis non est in anima*" is the same as to say that it is "*extra animam*."[355]

In the following text, Aquinas almost defines understanding by alterity. The question is whether the separate soul can have any knowledge of the separate substances (other separate souls or angels). The answer is affirmative, but the perfection of this knowledge varies, depending on the object; other separate souls can be known perfectly; the angels, instead, can be known in an imperfect way. The reason, for St. Thomas, is as follows: "Now, every separate substance 'understands what is above itself and what is below itself, according to the mode of its substance' (De Causis viii): for a thing is understood [insofar] as it is in the one who understands; while one thing is in another according to the nature of that in which it is."[356] The act of understanding, for St. Thomas, is verified by the presence of the object in the knowing subject, which is a "species" of one thing being present in

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in anima esse per suam similitudinem. Et quantum ad hoc, sunt duo genera potentiarum, scilicet sensitivum (…) et intellectivum (…) Alio vero modo, secundum quod ipsa anima inclinatur et tendit in rem exteriorem.] As has been shown before, and here again, what is extrinsic for St. Thomas is not only the object of sensitivity, but also the object of intelligence, i.e., the nature of the material thing.

[355] 76, 2 ad 4: "For what is understood is in the intellect, not according to its own nature, but according to its likeness; for 'the stone is not in the soul, but its likeness is,' as is said, De Anima iii, 8. Yet it is the stone which is understood, not the likeness of the stone; except by a reflection of the intellect on itself: otherwise, the objects of sciences would not be things, but only intelligible species." [Id enim quod intelligitur non est in intellectu secundum se, sed secundum suam similitudinem, *lapis enim non est in anima, sed species lapidis*, ut dicitur in *III De Anima*. Et tamen lapis est id quod intelligitur, non autem species lapidis, nisi per reflexionem intellectus supra seipsum, alioquin scientiae non essent de rebus, sed de speciebus intelligibilibus.] St. Thomas also uses the expression "*extra animam*" in *CG II*, 75, par. 8 (quoted on p. 114).

[356] 89, 2, c.: "Est autem commune omni substantiae separatae quod intelligat id quod est supra se, et id quod est infra se, per modum suae substantiae, sic enim intelligitur aliquid secundum quod est in intelligente; est autem aliquid in altero per modum eius in quo est."

another.[357] Although what is present in the other (other = the knower) is the thing itself, the mode in which it is present depends on the knower. This is not to say that the thing which is present is no longer the same and becomes the knower, but exactly the opposite. St. Thomas makes this very point in *De Ver.* 2, 2, referring to every knowledge:

> In order that there might be some remedy for this imperfection, another kind of perfection is to be found in created things. It consists in this, that the perfection belonging to one thing is found in another. This is the perfection of a knower in so far as he knows; for something is known by a knower by reason of the fact that the thing known is, in some fashion, in the possession of the knower…[358]

Although in these texts alterity is referred directly to the knower, it is obvious that the opposite of the "other" is also "another." Even more, it is significant that the focus is on the perfection of the known, and that the "other" is the subject as receptive of it; it is not the perfection of the knower which is in the known, but the perfection of the known which is in the knower.

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[357] Cf. Lambert, 90: "The necessity that a knowing being be able to asume other forms is expressed in this definition of knowledge, which shows immateriality to be only one component: 'To possess something in oneself formally and not materially, in which knowing consists, is a most noble way of possessing or containing something' [my trans., original Latin follows: Sicut autem habere aliquid in se formaliter et non materialiter, in quo consistit ratio cognitionis, est nobilissimus modus habendi vel continendi aliquid] (*In De Caus*, lect. 18, n. 339)."

[358] *De Ver.* 2, 2, c.: "Unde ut huic imperfectioni aliquod remedium esset, invenitur alius modus perfectionis in rebus creatis, secundum quod perfectio quae est propria unius rei, in altera re invenitur; et haec est perfectio cognoscentis in quantum est cognoscens, quia secundum hoc a cognoscente aliquid cognoscitur quod ipsum cognitum est aliquo modo apud cognoscentem…" Cf. *In I De Anima* 4, 19-36 "The truth, in fact, is that knowledge is verified by the presence of a likeness of the thing known in the knower; for the known must be in the knower somehow." (my trans.) [Veritas autem est, quod cognitio fit per similitudinem rei cognitae in cognoscente: oportet enim quod res cognita aliquo modo sit in cognoscente.]

This original fact, the presence of something in another (the knower), is that which requires a different mode of being of that perfection,[359] as we have seen in *Chapter 2*, and we see here again:

> The perfection of one thing cannot be in another according to the determined [being] which it has in the thing itself. Hence, if we wish to consider it in so far as it can be in another, we must consider it apart from those things which determine it by their very nature. Now, since forms and perfections of things are made determinate by matter, a thing is knowable in so far as it is separated from matter. For this reason, the subject in which these perfections are received must [also] be immaterial; for, if it were material, the perfection would be received in it according to a determinate [being]. It would, accordingly, not be in the intellect in a state in which it is knowable, that is, in the way in which the perfection of one thing can be in another.[360]

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[359] Stump offers a similar interpretation when explaining this "distinction of Aquinas's between two different ways of receiving a form": "But [the form] is transferred in such a way that it does not confer on the eye the substantial or accidental characteristics of a stone. A purple stone visually cognized does not make the eye purple even though the form of the stone's color is transferred to the eye" (Stump, 252*).* The distinction of the two modes of being of *De Ver* 2, 2 can be read in the following text of *In II De Anima* 14, 262-268: "I mean by 'material change' what happens when a quality is received by a subject according to the material mode (of) the subject's own existence, as e.g. when anything is cooled, or heated, or moved about in space; whereas by a 'spiritual change' I mean, here, what happens when the likeness of an object is received in the sense-organ, or in the medium between object and organ, as a form, causing knowledge, and not merely as a form in matter. For there is a difference between the mode of being which a sensible form has in the senses and that which it has in the thing sensed." [Dico autem immutationem naturalem prout qualitas recipitur in patiente secundum esse naturae, sicut cum aliquid infrigidatur vel calefit aut movetur secundum locum. Immutatio vero spiritualis est secundum quod species recipitur in organo sensus aut in medio per modum intentionis, et non per modum naturalis formae. Non enim sic recipitur species sensibilis in sensu secundum illud esse quod habet in re sensibili.]

[360] *De Ver*. 2, 2, c.: "Perfectio autem unius rei in altero esse non potest secundum determinatum esse quod habebat in re illa; et ideo ad hoc quod nata sit esse in re altera, oportet eam considerari absque his quae nata sunt eam determinare. Et quia formae et perfectiones rerum per materiam determinantur, inde est quod secundum hoc aliqua res est cognoscibilis secundum quod a materia separatur. Unde oportet ut et illud in quo suscipitur talis rei perfectio, sit immateriale; si enim esset materiale, perfectio recepta esset in eo secundum aliquod esse determinatum; et ita non esset in eo secundum quod est cognoscibilis; scilicet ut, existens perfectio unius, est nata esse in altero." Cf. Lambert, 94: "The immateriality of a knowing being bestows on it the ability to transcend contraction and isolation and to appropriate to itself forms other than its own."

Notice how, in the end, being as known ("*cognoscibilis"*) is identified with being in the other as other ("*existens perfectio unius, est nata esse in altero"*). There is no difference between this doctrine and the *Summa*'s, except for the more explicit expressions of alterity in knowing.

2.2. Identity: What Identity is Not

But what about identity? Is there not an identity in knowing, as St. Thomas himself says many times? What that identity is not will be more the focus in this section; in the next, the focus will be what that identity means for Aquinas.

To begin with, the identity is not absolute or *per se*, but *quodammodo* and by participation: "The intellectual soul forasmuch as it is actually understanding, participates the thing understood: for, in a way, the intellect in act is the thing understood in act."[361]

Then, if there is an identity, it is not an ontological identity at the level of the (substantial) being of the knower, as has been shown at the end of section 1 of this *Chapter*. Substantial being and cognitive operation are distinct in all creatures, even in the angels.[362] For Aquinas, the potency of being (*essentia*) cannot be the potency of the operation,

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[361] 84, 4 ob. 1: "Anima intellectiva, secundum quod est actu intelligens, participat ipsa intelligibilia, intellectus enim in actu, quodammodo est intellectum in actu."

[362] Cf. 77, 1 sc: "Dionysius (Coel. Hier. xi) says that 'heavenly spirits are divided into essence, power, and operation.' Much more, then, in the soul is the essence distinct from the virtue or power." [Sed contra est quod Dionysius dicit, XI cap. *Caelest. Hier*., quod caelestes spiritus dividuntur in essentiam, virtutem et operationem. Multo igitur magis in anima aliud est essentia, et aliud virtus sive potentia.] and 77, 1, c.: "Wherefore the Divine power which is the principle of His operation is the Divine Essence itself. This cannot be true either of the soul, or of any creature; as we have said above when speaking of the angels." [Unde Dei potentia, quae est operationis principium, est ipsa Dei essentia. Quod non potest esse verum neque in anima, neque in aliqua creatura; ut supra etiam de Angelo dictum est.]

because that would mean an identity of (substantial) being and operation (*esse et operare*), which is proper to God alone.

Let us next examine the text which will occupy us more directly in the following section. According to 85, 2 ad 1, an identity between the known in act and the intelligence in act cannot mean that the intellect knows its own subjective (natural) perfection, that is, the species as perfecting the faculty *subjectively* (according to the first mode of being of *De Ver.* 2, 2).[363] This identity (the Aristotelian "*intellectum in actu est intellectus in actu*") and the presence of the known in the knower (by means of the species) are two different concepts:

> The thing understood is in the intellect by its own likeness; and it is in this sense that we say that the thing understood [in act] is the intellect in act, because the likeness of the thing understood is the form of the intellect, as the likeness of a sensible thing is the form of the sense in act. Hence it does not follow that the intelligible species abstracted is what is actually understood; but rather that it is the likeness thereof.[364]

For Aquinas, in knowledge there are two realms of actualization: the act of the intellect as accidental faculty in its natural being, and the act of the intellect insofar as it understands. The first perfection is real, and it is the species in its real being (as accidental or secondary act of the intellect as operative potency). The second perfection is intentional, that is to say, the perfection of the known in the knower, by means of the species. The

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[363] It is challenging to indicate with one term the first mode of being of *De Ver* 2, 2, and therefore "subjective", "real", "natural" or "metaphysical" will be used alternatively, as seems more fitting. No term, in my view, is exempt from misunderstanding, since the intentional presence could also be referred to as something real, metaphysical, and so on. I hope that, by the context of opposition with "intentional", the reader will have a clear grasp of what is meant.

[364] 85, 2 ad 1: "Dicendum quod intellectum est in intelligente per suam similitudinem. Et per hunc modum dicitur quod intellectum in actu est intellectus in actu, inquantum similitudo rei intellectae est forma intellectus; sicut similitudo rei sensibilis est forma sensus in actu. Unde non sequitur quod species intelligibilis abstracta sit id quod actu intelligitur, sed quod sit similitudo eius."; cf. 85, 2, ob 1.

species as image has, then, a double aspect: it is a real being which represents something else, like a photo containing *both* its own being as paper *and* the presence of someone (the one whose photo was taken). The known is in the knower intentionally ("*Intellectum est in intelligente per suam similitudinem*"), whereas the species perfects the intellect naturally, subjectively ("*similitudo rei intellectae est forma intellectus*"). The species is the real being (*forma quo*) which allows the knower to be perfected intentionally, bringing to the knower the perfection of the known (*forma quod*) in a mode of being proportionate to the potency.

Therefore, it must be noted from the beginning that the identity in the text of Aristotle, according to St. Thomas, is not simply the identity of *intellectum* (object) and *intellectus*, but the identity of *intellectum in actu* and *intellectus in actu*. *Intellectum in actu* connotes here, for St. Thomas, the mode of being of the known *as known* (because it is not intelligible in act in reality), and therefore in this phrase it signifies for St. Thomas the species as *real* (not *intentional*) perfective form of the intellect as faculty. As a consequence, *Intellectus in actu* means here the intelligence as operative potency perfected by its proper form and, because this form is the *real* act of the intellect as a *real* operative potency, nothing prevents us from identifying a (real) thing with its own (real) perfection, here respectively the intellect and the species. More will be said in the next subsection.

3) The Identity is by Means of the Species

If knowledge is originally knowledge of the other, the only sense in which an identity with this object can be conceived is insofar as the subject becomes somehow the object. The subject is indeed perfected, in some way, with the perfection that is proper to the object, but in such a way that this perfection remains proper to the object. This perfection is

present in the subject as belonging to the object. That is why it is said to be "intentionally" present, as an attempt to express in words an original phenomenon that does not admit further resolution or images: it is present insofar as I am subjectively modified, developed, by the "possession" of a new perfection; but this presence is "intentional," insofar as that presence does not bring the object to be physically in me, but rather it is I who in some way refer to it, it is I who enter into a new relationship with the object. The object modifies me insofar as I refer to it. But it is not my reference that perfects the object; rather, it is the object that perfects me, or rather I who grow with the perfection of the object, in my intending of it. The problem in Epistemology is to understand this fact, or rather to accept it, instead of trying to reduce it to a physical phenomenon, easier to transform into images of physical causality. St. Thomas took as a point of departure this fact, and that is why, where St. Thomas is speaking about knowing, he cannot be understood by those who interpret him in physical terms. When one thing perfects another in the physical realm, the perfection of the agent becomes the perfection of the patient, and the act of the patient is its own. St. Thomas says in 85, 2 that knowing is not like that. When an object perfects a subject in the intentional realm, the perfection of the object *becomes* the perfection of the subject insofar as it *remains* the perfection of the object, insofar as it belongs to the other (the object) which is distinct from the subject.

This "identity in alterity"[365] in human knowing is verified by means of the species. The species is the real modification of the subject that allows him or her to intend the

[365] "Greek reason […] was able to see that the human intellect, in identifying itself immaterially, *intentionaliter*, with the being of things, truly reaches that which exists outside our

object as other. It is a real-subjective becoming or modification that allows the intellect to become intentionally what the knowing subject is not (really-subjectively).[366] It seems that the best example is a picture,[367] so common in our human experience. We know perfectly well that, in the picture, the person is not really present, and yet, the picture enables us to know the person, with our full realization that what we are seeing is only an image. We do not have any difficulty in recognizing that there is both a picture and something else that is pictured, with all of that in one real picture. The real thing and the reference are both there. Two real things are present though; that is, the person also is there, although not in the same way as is the material of the picture. The real person is present there with another mode of being. This is an "image" of what happens with the cognitive species.

The immediate purpose of this section is not to explain the nature of the species. It should be enough to understand that the species is a subjective quality in the intelligence that allows this faculty to refer to an object as such. It is very difficult to say more without falling into images from the physical realm that more obscure than clarify what knowing is. The best that can be said about knowing, I suggest, is what St. Thomas says in *De Veritate*: that knowing is a mode of perfection different from the natural mode of being, according to which the perfection of one thing is present in another as other.

The immediate purpose of this section, then, is to show that for Aquinas the Aristotelian "*intellectum in actu est intellectus in actu*" refers to the species, and not to an

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minds" (Jaques Maritain, *The Peasant of the Garonne* [New York: Hold, Rinehart and Winston, 1968], p. 18 in Cullen, 72).

[366] This is a reference to the first mode of being of *De Ver*. 2, 2.

[367] Owens uses this example as well: cf. Owens, 37 and 127.

ontological identity between knower and known. Several reasons for this have already been expressed. First, the ontological being of the knower for St. Thomas is different from the knower's operation (as we have seen previously[368]). Secondly, knowing is not perfective of the object but is perfected by it (which is the point of this whole section); if knowing were the form of the known as such, it would make perfect sense to say that the known does not have any other perfection than the act of the knower. Thirdly, Aquinas never defines knowing as a real identity with the known,[369] and he does, instead, characterize knowing as an alterity between the perfection of the knower and the known (as was shown in the previous section). It remains, however, to deal more directly with the text where the Aristotelian identity is explicitly treated[370] and to explore other texts that may enlighten the role of the species regarding the identity in knowing.

Some remarks may be helpful in order to summarize the proposed interpretation. For Aquinas, there is certainly an identity between intellect and species (a subjective identity of actualized potency and its own act); but, because what is known is not the species, this real identity does not take away the alterity of knowing, that is to say, the reference of the intellect to the other; rather, the species is the formal principle (*principium quo*) of the reference of the intellect to the real object.

The presence of the known in the knower is not called identity but rather a "being in", presence in, being in the other, etc., which is verified by means of the species. The

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[368] Cf. section 2 of this *Chapter*.

[369] The fact that Aquinas acknowledges *a certain* knowing that implies the identity of knower and known (at least in the separate substances), does not mean that he characterizes knowing as *essentially* an identity.

[370] 85, 2 ad 1.

mediation of the species does not take away the direct contact with the object. It would take it away, if the mediation were "objective"; that is to say, if the species had to be known first in order to know the thing itself. But for St. Thomas, the species is a subjective mediation, a subjective modification that makes the direct objective reference possible. There is a distinction in the species between the species itself and what is represented, between its real being as subjective modification and the content it possesses as image. The faculty, by means of this subjective modification, has access to the thing represented, as one who sees a picture recognizes the person him or herself, and not necessarily the materials of the picture.

3.1. The Aristotelian Identity

Let us now examine some texts that may show more clearly the position of St. Thomas in these matters. Aquinas' specific interpretation of the Aristotelian "The thing understood in act is the intellect in act" ("*Intellectum in actu est intellectus in actu*") has been anticipated in the previous section. In 85, 2 ob. 1, it is suggested that the presence of the object in the intellect is the same as the presence of the species in it as its perfection; therefore, species and object of the intellect are the same thing.[371] The argument is the

[371] 85, 2 ob. 1: "It would seem that the intelligible species abstracted from the phantasm is related to our intellect as that which is understood. For the understood in act is in the one who understands: since the understood in act is the intellect itself in act. But nothing of what is understood is in the intellect actually understanding, save the abstracted intelligible species. Therefore this species is what is actually understood." [Videtur quod species intelligibiles a phantasmatibus abstractae, se habeant ad intellectum nostrum sicut id quod intelligitur. Intellectum enim in actu est in intelligente, quia intellectum in actu est ipse intellectus in actu. Sed nihil de re intellecta est in intellectu actu intelligente, nisi species intelligibilis abstracta. Ergo huiusmodi species est ipsum intellectum in actu.]

Aristotelian text, to the authority of which St. Thomas will not object. But Aquinas says in the *Ad Unum*: "The thing understood is in the intellect by its own likeness."[372] Notice how, from the beginning, he is not talking about "*intellectum in actu*" but about "*intellectum"*, which stands for the object itself and not for the species (here "*similitudinem*"); this is the confusion in the objection. Aquinas continues: "And it is in this sense that we say that the thing understood [in act] is the intellect in act, because the likeness of the thing understood is the form of the intellect, as the likeness of a sensible thing is the form of the sense in act."[373] This is the precise interpretation of the Aristotelian text for Aquinas. That is, the identity ("*est*" can be interpreted in that way to some extent) is the identity of an actualized operative potency (*intellectus in actu* = *intellectus formatum*) with its perfective form (*similitudo rei intellectae* = *intellectum in actu*). This may not be Aquinas' interpretation of the Aristotelian text in other contexts, and it may also be a misinterpretation of Aristotle; however, for Aquinas, here, *intellectum in actu* does not mean object of the intellect (*quod actu intelligitur*). Therefore, he can conclude: "Hence it does not follow that the intelligible species abstracted is what is actually understood; but rather that it is the likeness thereof."[374] The species is certainly the perfective form of the intellect for Aquinas, and still it is not what is understood, but a representation of what is understood. That is why, if an identity is supported with this Aristotelian text in Aquinas, it is not the identity between

[372] 85, 2 ad 1: "Intellectum est in intelligente per suam similitudinem."

[373] 85, 2 ad 1: "Et per hunc modum dicitur quod intellectum in actu est intellectus in actu, inquantum similitudo rei intellectae est forma intellectus; sicut similitudo rei sensibilis est forma sensus in actu."

[374] 85, 2 ad 1: "Unde non sequitur quod species intelligibilis abstracta sit id quod actu intelligitur, sed quod sit similitudo eius."

object and knower, nor the identity between the being of the object and the being of the knower, but the identity of the intellect with its species as perfective form. [375]

Other works of Aquinas can help us to confirm our interpretation: "The known is a perfection of the knower, not by its substance (for the thing is outside the knower), but rather by the likeness by which it is known; for a perfection exists in the perfected—and the likeness of the stone, not the stone, exists in the soul."[376] In the following text "species" stands for the perfection that is known:

> Hence, the species of a thing, as present in phantasms, is not actually intelligible, since in this state it is not one with the intellect in act, but is one with it according as the species is abstracted from the phantasms. Just so, the species of color is not perceived [in act insofar] as it exists in the stone, but only [insofar] as it exists in the pupil.[377]

What is interesting is that the species is something that is present in the thing itself, but in the thing itself is not united to the faculty (and therefore is not *known* in act). What is united to the faculty is the *abstracted* species (in the case of the intellect), not the realities themselves *in their natural being.* Although it is clear that *the perfection itself* is one with the intellect in act and that St. Thomas is referring to the Aristotelian identity, it is even more clear that this identity does not come about on account of the content, but on account of the mode of being of the content. In other words, the nature of the stone in its

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[375] The same interpretation can be seen clearly in other texts and works of Aquinas: cf. *CG II*, 98, par. 14-19; *Ibid.,* 99, par. 5-7; *In III De anima* 7, 37-48; *Summa* I, 14, 2 (see *Appendix*, note 10).

[376] *De Ver*. 2, 3 ad 1: "Intellectum non est perfectio intelligentis secundum illam rem quae cognoscitur (res enim illa est extra intelligentem), sed secundum rei similitudinem qua cognoscitur, quia perfectio est in perfecto; lapis autem non est in anima, sed similitudo lapidis."

[377] *CG II*, 59, par. 13: "Species igitur rei, secundum quod est in phantasmatibus, non est intelligibilis actu: *non enim sic est unum cum intellectu in actu* sed secundum quod est a phantasmatibus abstracta; sicut nec species coloris est sensata in actu secundum quod est in lapide, sed solum secundum quod est in pupilla." Cf. par. 10.

abstracted mode of being, i.e., *the species (= representation) of the nature of the stone (= universal content)*, is the perfection of the intellect in act. This is the same doctrine as that of the *Summa*.

It seems that *In De Anima* uses the word "species" moreso to indicate the cognitive representation: "But these intelligible ideas are not precisely what the mind understands; they are only the latter's likeness present in the soul; hence it is quite possible for many intellects to possess likenesses of one and the same object, so that one thing is understood by all."[378] In the following text we have an alternative

expression of the Aristotelian identity: *Scientia* = *intellectus in actu* and *scibile in actu* = *intellectum in actu*.[379] Species is again the *representation* of the thing known. The text says: "Speculative knowledge and what is knowable 'in this way' (i.e. in act) are identical. Therefore the [species] of the actually understood thing is also [the species] of the [intellect itself], through which the latter can understand itself."[380] Because the representation of the

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[378] *In III De Anima* 2, 285-289: "Non enim est species intelligibilis, ipsum intellectum, sed similitudo eius in anima: et ideo si sunt plures intellectus habentes similitudinem unius et eiusdem rei, erit eadem res intellecta apud omnes."

[379] In the same way should be understood the following text, although the wording is slightly different. *In III De Anima* 4, 173-176: "He states three properties of intellect in act. First, its actual knowledge is identical with the thing known; which is not true of intellect as potential." [Tres ponit conditiones intellectus in actu: quarum prima est, quod scientia in actu, est idem rei scitae. Quod non est verum de intellectu in potentia.] Cf. *In III De Anima* 5, 263-269: "He repeats what he has said of intellect in act, that actual knowledge is one with (the thing known in act)." [Resumit quiddam quod supra dictum est de intellectu secundum actum (…) et dicit quod *scientia secundum actum es idem rei* scite secundum actum."] (my underline, Leon. emphasis) In this latter text St. Thomas himself clarifies that the first text referred to the *intellectum in actu*, and not simply to the *res intellecta*. Cf. *In Met*. 12, lect. 11, 2620.

[380] *In III De Anima* 3, 78-82: "Ipsa enim *scientia speculativa et sic scibile*, idest scibile in actu, *idem est*. Species igitur rei intellectae in actu, est species ipsius intellectus; et sic per eam seipsum intelligere potest." (Leon. emphasis) Cf. *In Met.* 12, lect. 8, 2539: "For an intellect becomes intelligible by reason of the fact that it apprehends something intelligible. Hence, since the intellect

thing known is the form ("*species*" as subjective actuality) of the intellect itself, by means of this species (representation) of the thing *already* understood ("rei *intellectae*") the intellect can *subsequently* know itself ("seipsum intelligere *potest*"). For Aquinas, the first object of human understanding is not the intellect itself, but the nature of corporeal things, and it is by the knowledge of them that the intellect becomes intelligible in act and, thus, object of its own understanding.[381]

3.2. Species, Identity and Alterity

Let us now examine some texts about the role of the species concerning the aforementioned. In doing so, we are trying to emphasize that, for Aquinas, there is a distinction between species and object of knowledge. Identity in knowing refers to the species, whereas alterity refers to the object. That the object is not the phantasm but a universal content abstracted from its individual conditions in matter has already been discussed.[382]

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becomes intelligible by conceiving some intelligible object, it follows that the intellect and its intelligible object are the same." [Fit enim intellectus intelligibilis per hoc quod attingit aliquod intelligibile. Et ideo, cum *ipse intellectus fiat intelligibilis concipiendo aliquod intelligibile*, sequetur quod idem sit intellectus et intelligibile.]

[381] The fact that it is already an immaterial reality (and so in act, in a sense) does not take away the fact that the human intellect is in potency regarding its *proper* act (before the subject understands something, the human intellect is *tabula rasa*) and therefore the intellect cannot be known in itself, because what is known is known insofar as it is in act. The reality of the intellect before the subject understands is immaterial, and so it could be intelligible for someone whose object of understanding is the separate substances. But our intellect is completely potential, and *it is moved* to understand by an agent object (the nature of corporeal things): only then does it pass from potency to act of understanding, and so becomes actual and intelligible *for us*. In other words, the presence of the intellect to itself, while it is in potency of understanding, does not produce knowledge of itself, because what is in potency cannot be known as such, nor be an agent object. Cf. *In Met.* 12, lect. 8, 2539, just quoted. For other studied texts in support of our interpretation of the Aristotelian identity, coming from *In Metaphysicorum*, see *Appendix*, Note 11.

[382] Cf. *Chapter 1*, sections 2 and 3.

For Aquinas, the species is *principium quo* (not the object) of knowing, for both sense and intellect. For example: "The intelligible species is to the intellect what the sensible image is to the sense. But the sensible image is not what is perceived, but rather that by which sense perceives. Therefore the intelligible species is not what is actually understood, but that by which the intellect understands."[383] *Principium quo* means that the species is a form or perfection *by which* a certain operation is accomplished or made real.[384] Similarly in 89, 6, c., in talking about the act of understanding in the separate soul, the species is clearly *principium quo* and not the object:

> Action offers two things for our consideration—its species and its mode. Its species comes from the object, whereto the faculty of knowledge is directed by the (intelligible) species, which is the object's similitude; whereas the mode is gathered from the power of the agent. Thus that a person see a stone is due to the species of the stone in his eye; but that he see it clearly, is due to the eye's visual power.[385]

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[383] 85, 2, sc.: "Species intelligibilis se habet ad intellectum, sicut species sensibilis ad sensum. Sed species sensibilis non est illud quod sentitur, sed magis id quo sensus sentit. Ergo species intelligibilis non est quod intelligitur actu, sed id quo intelligit intellectus." This distinction between species and object can be seen in other texts as well: cf. *De Ver* 2, 3, ad 2, ad 3 and ad 10; *CG II*, 75, par. 7 and 9; *Q.D. De Anima*, a.2, ad 5; *Q.D. De Anima*, a.3, ad 7; *De Spirit. Creat*., a.9, ad 6; *De Spirit. Creat*., a.10, ad 12. (see *Appendix*, Note 12).

[384] Cf. 85, 2, c.: "There is a twofold action (Metaph. ix), one which remains in the agent; for instance, to see and to understand; and another which passes into an external object; for instance, to heat and to cut; and each of these actions proceeds in virtue of some form […] Hence that by which the sight sees is the likeness of the visible thing; and the likeness of the thing understood, that is, the intelligible species, is the form by which the intellect understands." [Cum enim sit duplex actio, sicut dicitur *IX Metaphys*., una quae manet in agente, ut videre et intelligere, altera quae transit in rem exteriorem, ut calefacere et secare; utraque fit secundum aliquam formam (…) Unde similitudo rei visibilis est secundum quam visus videt; et similitudo rei intellectae, quae est species intelligibilis, est forma secundum quam intellectus intelligit.]

[385] 89, 6, c.: "In actu est duo considerare, scilicet speciem actus, et modum ipsius. Et species quidem actus consideratur ex obiecto in quod actus cognoscitivae virtutis dirigitur *per speciem*, quae est obiecti similitudo, sed modus actus pensatur ex virtute agentis. Sicut quod aliquis videat lapidem, contingit *ex specie lapidis* quae est in oculo, sed quod acute videat, contingit ex virtute visiva oculi."

The species is the real act of the intellect as operative potency and, because of this, it is the species that can make the intellect an object of knowing in itself: "[The intellect] understands itself according as it is made actual by the species abstracted from sensible things, through the light of the active intellect, which not only actuates the intelligible things themselves, but also, by their instrumentality, actuates the passive intellect."[386] This takes us to the important difference in the species between what it is and what it represents as image. The species makes the intellect intelligible in act because of what the species is in itself[387] but, as image, the species makes known directly the represented object. That is why, for St. Thomas, the species in itself is known only in a second moment, by reflection: "But since the intellect reflects upon itself, by such reflection it understands both its own act of intelligence, and the species by which it understands. Thus the intelligible species is that which is understood secondarily; but that which is primarily understood is the object, of which the species is the likeness."[388] The end of the corpus reinforces the same point, that the species is a form in the soul (real being) that makes us know the thing outside the soul (intentional being):

> This also appears from the opinion of the ancient philosophers, who said that 'like is known by like.' For they said that the soul knows the earth outside itself, by the earth within itself; and so of the rest. If, therefore, we take the species of the earth instead of the earth, according to Aristotle (*De Anima iii*, 8), who says 'that a stone is

[386] 87, 1, c.: "Consequens est ut sic seipsum intelligat intellectus noster, secundum quod fit actu per species a sensibilibus abstractas per lumen intellectus agentis, quod est actus ipsorum intelligibilium, et eis mediantibus intellectus possibilis."

[387] Cf. *In Met.* 12, lect. 8, 2539 (quoted on p. 158 at footnote 380) and footnote 381.

[388] 85, 2, c.: "Sed quia intellectus supra seipsum reflectitur, secundum eandem reflexionem intelligit et suum intelligere, et speciem qua intelligit. Et sic species intellecta secundario est id quod intelligitur. Sed id quod intelligitur primo, est res cuius species intelligibilis est similitudo."

> not in the soul, but only the likeness of the stone'; it follows that the soul knows external things by means of its intelligible species.[389]

Knowing is of the things outside the soul, not of the species: "Therefore if what we understand is merely the intelligible species in the soul, it would follow that every science would not be concerned with objects outside the soul, but only with the intelligible species within the soul."[390]

The following text has already been quoted, but it also shows how the real presence of the species in the mind is perfectly compatible for Aquinas with the reference to the thing outside the mind. The thing is in the mind by means of the species: "It follows of necessity that this something extrinsic, which is the object of the soul's operation, must be related to the soul in a twofold manner. First, inasmuch as this something extrinsic has a natural aptitude to be united to the soul, and to be by its likeness in the soul."[391] Significantly, it is the thing that is in the mind, and not the mind in the thing, which is the characteristic of the *secunda ratio* according to which the mind is compared to the external thing.

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[389] 85, 2, c.: "Et hoc etiam patet ex antiquorum opinione, qui ponebant simile simili cognosci. Ponebant enim quod anima per terram quae in ipsa erat, cognosceret terram quae extra ipsam erat; et sic de aliis. Si ergo accipiamus speciem terrae loco terrae, secundum doctrinam Aristotelis, qui dicit quod *lapis non est in anima, sed species lapidis*; sequetur quod anima per species intelligibiles cognoscat res quae sunt extra animam." This "double being" of the species, i.e., its real being as subjective modification and its "representative" being, can be seen in other texts: cf. *De Ver* 2, 3, ad 9; *In Boet. De Trin*. 5, 2, c.; *Q.D. De Anima*, a.2, ob. 7 (see *Appendix*, Note 13).

[390] 85, 2, c.: "Si igitur ea quae intelligimus essent solum species quae sunt in anima, sequeretur quod scientiae omnes non essent de rebus quae sunt extra animam, sed solum de speciebus intelligibilibus quae sunt in anima…"

[391] 78, 1, c.: "Necesse est extrinsecam rem, quae est obiectum operationis animae, secundum duplicem rationem ad animam comparari. Uno modo, secundum quod nata est animae coniungi et in anima esse per suam similitudinem."

Knowing, if not by identity, can be said to be by likeness.[392] But this likeness implies precisely the distinction between knower and known; likeness implies a "formal" oneness, not a substantial one.[393] In the following text, for example, the material things, evidently different from the knower, are the main object. Moreover, knowing does not imply a physical likeness, as the natural philosophers supposed. In the case of our knowing of material things, knowing implies, instead, a distinction between the mode of being of the known in the mind ("*similitudinibus… a phantasmatibus abstractis"*) and outside the mind ("*materialia*"). In knowing there is a likeness because the same perfection is present, but not in a physical way: it is present by means of a species, which is not the known but a likeness of the known.

> The likeness of nature is not a sufficient cause of knowledge; otherwise what Empedocles said would be true —that the soul needs to have the nature of all in

[392] At the conclusion of this section we will see in what sense we could still speak about an identity in knowing (namely as intentional identity). I prefer not to speak about identity as a primordial characteristic of knowing insofar as identity means (in general and in the text of the Aristotelian identity) an ontological oneness. As we have seen, in human knowing the priority, phenomenologically speaking and for Aquinas, belongs to alterity, insofar as the (ontological) identity between the species and the intellect is the means by which this more original identity-in-alterity is explained. In other words, identity comes to explain the presence of the other in the subject. As suggests Gilles Mongeau (TST professor), "likeness" refers to (the perfection of) the object as present by the species, and "identity" to the species as perfecting the intellect; knowing by likeness and not by identity means, therefore, that what is proper to knowing is not that we are one thing with our species (real identity), but that the object (originally other) is present to us by means of its species.

[393] By "formal" oneness I simply mean here "intentional." See my remarks on Knasas' "numerical" identity on p. 40 ff. The intentional identity could be called "numerical" in a wide sense, insofar as there is no distinction between content of knowing and the thing that is known; and it could be also called "formal" identity, again in a wide sense, insofar as there is a certain distinction between the thing itself (which is not in the mind *in its real being*) and the content in its cognitive mode of being. But because both words express imperfectly the phenomenon of knowing, "intentional" seems to be the best word to indicate this identity-in-alterity. This is why I think that the phenomenon of knowing (the intentional identity) cannot be reduced to (meta)physical categories, such as "formal" or "numerical" identity.

> order to know all. But knowledge requires that the likeness of the thing known be in the knower, as a kind of form thereof. Now our passive intellect, in the present state of life, is such that it can be informed with similitudes abstracted from phantasms: and therefore it knows material things rather than immaterial substances.[394]

The species, even in the case of the second intellectual operation, is never an objective intermediary that would block the way to the extra-mental reality.[395] The point is worth noting because, in the case of judgment, what is represented is actually not in reality as such; that is, the affirmation is an act of the mind that is not found in reality.[396] Still, because the affirmation refers to reality, the enunciations also refer to reality through the species, and not primarily to the species themselves. This is another indication that, for St. Thomas, the direct contact with reality does not need to rely on a real identity with the known. Rather, it is the mediation of the species that ensures the contact with reality.

In the following passage, the distinction between the known (*ea quae cognoscit*) and the species by which it is known (*ea quibus*) is clear, and it can also be seen that the

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[394] 88, 1 ad 2: "Dicendum quod similitudo naturae non est ratio sufficiens ad cognitionem, alioquin oporteret dicere quod Empedocles dixit, quod anima esset de natura omnium, ad hoc quod omnia cognosceret. Sed requiritur ad cognoscendum, ut sit similitudo rei cognitae in cognoscente quasi quaedam forma ipsius. Intellectus autem noster possibilis, secundum statum praesentis vitae, est natus informari similitudinibus rerum materialium a phantasmatibus abstractis, et ideo cognoscit magis materialia quam substantias immateriales." Here, that which has been discussed in *Chapter 1* regarding the formal object of intelligence is very clear. The species is a likeness of the material things (because it is a likeness of their nature) and at the same time it is abstracted from matter (the intelligible species that informs the intellect is not the phantasm). The species is not a reference *of the intellect* to the phantasm, but a likeness of the *quidditas* of that phantasm. The *conversio* will therefore be the reference *of the abstracted species* (as act of the possible intellect) to the phantasm.

[395] Cf. 85, 2 ad 3; 85, 5, sc. Fabro distinguishes between the species of Democritus (objective – objective: perception is reduced to a physical relationship and causality between object and faculty, cf. *PP* 40-44), the species of idealism (subjective – subjective: the subject knows only his or her subjective modification) and the Thomistic species (subjective – objective: a real modification in the subject that makes intentionally present the perfection of the object). Cf. *PP* 463-476, especially page 472.

[396] Cf. *De Veritate*, q. 1, a. 3 c..

distinction between the mode of being of the species and the mode of being of the known is not an obstacle to the objectivity of knowing:

> These words of Augustine are to be understood as referring to the medium of intellectual knowledge, and not to its object. For the intellect knows bodies by understanding them, not indeed through bodies, nor through material and corporeal species; but through immaterial and intelligible species, which can be in the soul by their own essence.[397]

The fact that many things can be known by means of one species[398] is another way to say that, in the species, there is a difference between its real being (one) and what it represents (in this case, the many). Because the intellect is one, and the species is really-subectively perfective of that intellect, there can be no more than one species at a given time. But the same does not apply to the object, at least not for the same reason. Again, what is understood is not the species in its identity with the intellect, but the thing itself through the species.

In 84, 7, the reason for the *conversio ad phantasmata* is the reference of the intelligible species to the material thing outside the mind. In the *Ad Unum*, we can see again

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[397] 84, 1 ad 1: "Dicendum quod verbum Augustini est intelligendum quantum ad ea quibus intellectus cognoscit, non autem quantum ad ea quae cognoscit. Cognoscit enim corpora intelligendo, sed non per corpora, neque per similitudines materiales et corporeas; sed per species immateriales et intelligibiles, quae per sui essentiam in anima esse possunt."

[398] Cf. 85, 4, c.: "The intellect can, indeed, understand many things [as a unity], but not as many: that is to say by one but not by many intelligible species. For the mode of every action follows the form which is the principle of that action. Therefore whatever things the intellect can understand under one species, it can understand at the same time […] Therefore it is impossible for one and the same intellect to be perfected at the same time by different intelligible species so as actually to understand different things." [Intellectus quidem potest multa intelligere per modum unius, non autem multa per modum multorum, dico autem per modum unius vel multorum, per unam vel plures species intelligibiles. Nam modus cuiusque actionis consequitur formam quae est actionis principium. Quaecumque ergo intellectus potest intelligere sub una specie, simul intelligere potest (…) Impossibile est ergo quod idem intellectus simul perficiatur diversis speciebus intelligibilibus, ad intelligendum diversa in actu.]

a double aspect in the species. One aspect allows presence and possession, insofar as the species is kept in the possible intellect (identity). Another aspect allows objectivity, insofar as it represents the natures subsisting in the particular (alterity). The text says: "We need further to make use of them in a manner befitting the things of which they are the species, which things are natures existing in individuals."[399]

"Species" may sometimes refer more to the object than to the image in its subjective being:

> In the same way the sensible form is conditioned differently in the thing which is external to the soul, and in the senses which receive the forms of sensible things without receiving matter, such as the color of gold without receiving gold. So also the intellect, according to its own mode, receives under conditions of immateriality and immobility, the species of material and mobile bodies: for the received is in the receiver according to the mode of the receiver.[400]

In the following text, also, the word "species" in "*naturam speciei*" refers to something real in the thing whereas, in "speciem intelligibilem," the same word has the meaning of form of the intellect. The species as form of the intellect is representative of the universal nature subsistent in the particular, as the phantasm is representative of the individual principles of the same thing: "This is what we mean by abstracting the universal from the particular, or the intelligible species from the phantasm; that is, by considering the

[399] 84, 7 ad 1: "… oportet quod eis [species conservatae in intellectu possibili] utamur secundum quod convenit rebus quarum sunt species, quae sunt naturae in particularibus existentes."

[400] 84, 1, c.: "Et per hunc etiam modum forma sensibilis alio modo est in re quae est extra animam, et alio modo in sensu, qui suscipit formas sensibilium absque materia, sicut colorem auri sine auro. Et similiter intellectus species corporum, quae sunt materiales et mobiles, recipit immaterialiter et immobiliter, secundum modum suum, nam receptum est in recipiente per modum recipientis."

nature of the species apart from its individual qualities represented by the phantasms."[401]

Similarly in the *Ad Tertium*:

> This is done by the power of the active intellect which by turning towards the phantasm produces in the passive intellect a certain likeness which represents, as to its specific conditions only, the thing reflected in the phantasm. It is thus that the intelligible species is said to be abstracted from the phantasm…[402]

This interpretation of the word "*species*" here, however, could be considered questionable. Therefore, an important clarification is in order. As has been shown, the species or *similitudo* is certainly called *quod intelligitur* and *intellectum in actu* by Aquinas. What Aquinas means is not that the intellect knows its own subjective perfection, but that it knows the nature of the corporeal thing *insofar* as it is present in an intelligible mode of being in the species. In other words, the species is *quod intelligitur* insofar as it is the nature understood (*intellectum*) in a mode of being proportionate to the faculty (*in actu*, i.e., in act of being intelligible). For the same reason, the object of intelligence seems, at least in the two previous texts, to be called *species intelligibilis*. What Aquinas means is not that we know the species as subjective modification, but that we know the species of the thing (= the real nature subsisting in the thing) in an intelligible mode of being.[403] In any case, and

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[401] 85, 1 ad 1: "Et hoc est abstrahere universale a particulari, vel speciem intelligibilem a phantasmatibus, considerare scilicet naturam speciei absque consideratione individualium principiorum, quae per phantasmata repraesentantur."

[402] 85, 1 ad 3: "Sed virtute intellectus agentis resultat quaedam similitudo in intellectu possibili ex conversione intellectus agentis supra phantasmata, quae quidem est repraesentativa eorum quorum sunt phantasmata, solum quantum ad naturam speciei. Et per hunc modum dicitur abstrahi species intelligibilis a phantasmatibus…"

[403] Stump also acknowledges a similar tension in Aquinas' use of "species", particularly in sensible knowing: "It is important to emphasize that a sensible species is not itself what is sensed. Instead it is the means by which the senses sense extramental things. There is room for confusion here, because Aquinas does talk about the sensory power apprehending the sensible species, and locutions of this sort can give the mistaken impression that what the senses sense, on Aquinas's

hopefully enough evidence has been offered for this, Aquinas does not confuse object with species, he denies explicitly that the object of knowing is the species, and he does not explain the Aristotelian identity as an identity between knowing subject and what is understood (object), but as an identity between knowing subject and the species as a perfective form (*intellectum in actu* in the sense explained, not simply *intellectum*).

It could be objected that such an account does not rely so much on the words of Aquinas as it does on the interpretation of the words. This is exactly the point. The words of Aquinas can be used in any sense (as has been done for centuries even with the Bible). But an interpretation of his words must look for the unity that was in his mind. It would be very difficult to substantiate a claim that Aquinas changes his mind in the space of fifteen questions of the *Summa*. Granted, then, that he maintains the same Epistemology all the way through, it is necessary to look for coherence in his statements. Explicit statements need to be used to clarify the more obscure. If, then, Aquinas does not explicitly deny that which he explicitly affirms several times, and if his more obscure texts find a plausible explanation, we may have a *human* hope of reaching his mind. That a human work is perfectible and even fallible should not make us shy away from offering the fruits of our work.

A final remark on the importance of the intellectual cognitive species in Aquinas would not be out of place. Although the intellect is a participation of the uncreated light, in which (in the uncreated light) the eternal reasons are contained, we still need species

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view, is in fact the sensible species, contrary to what I just claimed" (cf. Stump, 249); and she quotes Aquinas: "To cognize things by means of their similitudes existing in the cognizer is to cognize those things as they are in themselves, or in their own natures" (cf. 256, in note: *ST* Ia.12.9).

coming from the corporeal things in order to know them. The species is thus essential in Thomistic gnoseology, and it is not to be confounded with the light of the intellect: "But since besides the intellectual light which is in us, intelligible species, which are derived from things, are required in order for us to have knowledge of material things; therefore this same knowledge is not due merely to a participation of the eternal types…"[404] We will later discuss more extensively this passage.[405]

It seems clear, then, that for Aquinas the identity in the Aristotelian phrase "*intellectum in actu est intellectus in actu*" is referred to the species in its subjective, real being as act of the intellect, and not to the object, as if it were an identity of knower and known. It is the identity between operative potency and its own *forma quo*, the latter carefully distinguished by St. Thomas from the object (*forma quod*).

If a certain identity with the object itself were to be affirmed, it should be first of all clearly distinguished from a real identity (the oneness in substance, or in the natural being); then, it should be established on the basis of the species as likeness (and so on the basis of a *certain* formal or qualitative oneness); finally, it could be called an "intentional identity," provided that the terms "natural" and "intentional" are clearly distinguished (as in *De Veritate*) and that the word "intentional" implies the more original alterity of the object. The best formula to speak about this identity *secundum quid* is also Aristotelian, and St. Thomas embraces it: "*anima est* quodammodo *omnia*." The soul can be all things, at least in

[404] 84, 5, c.: "Quia tamen praeter lumen intellectuale in nobis, exiguntur species intelligibiles a rebus acceptae, ad scientiam de rebus materialibus habendam; ideo non per solam participationem rationum aeternarum de rebus materialibus notitiam habemus…"

[405] Cf. *Chapter 4*, section 2.

a sense, insofar as by knowing them it *becomes* the other things, it does *receive* their perfection. But because that perfection is not received subjectively, that is, because the becoming is not "real", the identity is *quodammodo*, only in a certain sense.[406] When we say "intentionally," I suggest, we do not say much more than this, nor are we able to say much more.[407]

It is not uncommon to find a certain confusion in Thomism between the Aristotelian "*intellectus in actu est intellectum in actu*" and the intentional identity between object and subject.[408] In the case of Gilson, such confusion appears to be at the level of textual interpretation only; Gilson uses the Aristotelian phrase to indicate the intentional identity between knower and known, but at the same time he distinguishes the intentional presence of the object from its subjective-real being.[409] He says that the identity between the actuality of subject and object is not numerical, but formal. It is not numerical, because the being of each thing in itself is preserved when we know (alterity in knowing). It is formal because, for Gilson, there is no other identity between the form of the object itself and of the object as known. This formal identity is actually the identity between the species *as such* and the thing itself. Now, this identity is not the Aristotelian identity, firstly because

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[406] The following text in *In De Anima* puts together beautifully these two "identities." *In II De Anima* 12, 76-79: "Now, all knowledge implies that the thing known is somehow present in the knower, that is, present by its similitude. The knower in act, in fact, is the thing known in act." (my trans.) [Cognitio autem omnis fit per hoc, quod cognitum est *aliquo modo* in cognoscente, scilicet *secundum similitudinem*. Nam cognoscens in actu, est ipsum cognitum in actu.] The knower possesses *in a certain sense* the known, because the representation of the known is *really* one with the knower.

[407] For an interesting text in which St. Thomas speaks about this intentional identity without *quodammodo*, cf. *In III De Anima* 6, 297-305 (see *Appendix*, Note 14).

[408] A similar use of the Aristotelian phrase to indicate an identity between subject and object can be seen in Cromp, 37.

[409] Cf. *RM* 56-57.

the latter is *numerical* (as a potency is one with its own act) and secondly because this identity is *not between the species and the object in its real being*, but between the intellect in act and the abstracted species. Still, is this formal identity enough to express the intentional presence of the object to the subject, and is this formal identity not making of the species an objective intermediary between the intellect and the thing itself (i.e., something to be known first, before the thing itself, and not something that makes known immediately the thing itself, as St. Thomas suggests)?[410] Postulating a simply formal identity between the species and the object in its real being may lead to the problem of the bridge and to considering truth as a copy of reality.

4) Knowing as Receptive

At this point, it may not be out of place to recall the aim of this research. It has been important to clarify in what sense Aquinas speaks of identity and alterity in knowing, in order to show that, for him, intellectual knowing is not to provide intelligible content to the object, but to receive it from the object; that is, knowing is a being perfected by a

[410] Cf. Gilson, *Thomisme: Introduction a la Philosophie de Saint Thomas d'Aquin*, Cinquième Édition Revue et Augmentée, Paris: Vrin, 1944, p. 320 in Berger, 36: "It is crucial to understand that it is not that the species of an object is one thing, and the object itself another thing; the species is the object itself as species, that is, *the object considered in its action and in its efficacy which it exercises on a subject*. Only in this sense can it be said that it is not the species of the object that which is present in thinking, but the object itself through its species; and in the same way that the object's form is the object's active and determinant principle, it is also the object's form which becomes, by its species, the intellect that understands it" (my emphasis). As I have suggested in the *Introduction*, it seems to me that a greater distinction between content and mode of being of the content could have made things more clear: the species is the object insofar as it represents it, and it is not the object insofar as it is a subjective modification of the subject. My worry is that the agency ("*efficace*") in Gilson is not the intentional agency of the agent object (the *species impressa*) on the possible intellect, but a certain "real" causality of the object in itself on the intellect, where the object produces something similar to itself (the representation).

perfection belonging to the object and lacking in the subject. The agent intellect then, if it is to provide an intelligibility of some sort, it will be in the realm of what has been called intelligibility as mode of being, not as content. That which should also be clear is the reason for stressing the interpretation of the Aristotelian identity in Aquinas as an identity, not between intellect and object, but between intellect and species; if the subjective perfection of the intellect (*intellectus in actu*) and the perfection of the object *as content* were the same, that is, if understanding itself were the form of the known, it would be possible to consider intelligibility as an effect of the intellect, and to ascribe to the agent intellect this active function. Now, because, for Aquinas, the perfection of the known *as content* is its own, the "*materia prima*" which is actualized with the form of the known is the possible intellect. The agent intellect perfects the phantasm with intelligibility *as a mode of being*, but this is a condition of possibility of knowing, not knowing itself, and this implies that the content is already present in the material thing, and is distinct from its individual conditions.[411]

The present section is devoted to those texts in which knowing (both in general and as intellectual) is presented as a kind of receiving. This presentation of knowing as receiving will reinforce the idea of alterity as a characteristic of knowing, as well as the idea that understanding cannot be identified with the activity of the agent intellect; and as a consequence, the notion of knowing as a being perfected, and not a perfecting activity. That the agent intellect is not a formal but a metaphysical a priori means, in fact, that the agent intellect is not responsible for the perfection of the known *as content*, but rather allows this

[411] Cf. *Chapter 1*.

perfection of the known to be intentionally perfective of the knower (in its possible intellect).

The intellect is characterized from the beginning of Aquinas' treatise on human being as a receptive potency: "Now the receptive potentiality in the intellectual soul is other than the receptive potentiality of first matter, as appears from the diversity of the things received by each. For primary matter receives individual forms; whereas the intelligence receives absolute forms."[412]

The comparison with the *materia prima* deserves some attention, as there are both similarities and differences. In 84, 3, Aquinas is denying that we know by means of innate ideas. The second objection says: "The intellectual soul is more excellent than corporeal primary matter. But primary matter was created by God under the forms to which it has potentiality. Therefore much more is the intellectual soul created by God under intelligible species. And so the soul understands corporeal things through innate species."[413] The

[412] 75, 5 ad 1: "Est autem alia potentia receptiva in anima intellectiva, a potentia receptiva materiae primae, ut patet ex diversitate receptorum, nam materia prima recipit formas individuales, intellectus autem recipit formas absolutas." The sense in which Aquinas speaks about passivity in human knowing can be taken from *In II De Anima* 11, 109-117 (quoted on p. 144 at footnote 349); cf. *In I De Anima* 10, 202-208: "In [the act of the intellect] there is no movement of the material substance, as in the case of vegetative activities, nor even any alteration of [a material] subject, as in the case of sense-awareness. There is only an activity which is called movement simply because the mind goes from potency into act." [Nam in operatione intellectus non est mutatio secundum esse naturale, sicut est in vegetabili, nec subiectum naturale quod immutetur, sicut est in sensibili. Sed est ibi ipsa operatio, quae quodammodo dicitur motus, inquantum de intelligente in potentia fit intelligens in actu.]; *In II De Anima* 11, 173-179; *Q.D. De Anima*, a.6, c.: "To receive, to be a subject, and other things of this sort, are not found in the soul and in prime matter in the same specific way." [Recipere et subjici et alia huiusmodi non secundum eamdem rationem conveniunt animae et materiae primae.]; *Q.D. De Anima*, a.6, ad 5 (the last two quotes also in Lambert, 87-88).

[413] 84, 3 ob. 2: "Anima intellectiva est nobilior quam materia prima corporalis. Sed materia prima est creata a Deo sub formis ad quas est in potentia. Ergo multo magis anima intellectiva est

comparison is established on the basis that both matter and intellect are potencies of certain *real* perfective forms (first mode of being of *De Veritate*). St. Thomas does not deny that the species are real perfections of the intellect; they are not, however, its substantial perfection, but rather accidental ones. The comparison in the objection does not work: "Primary matter has substantial being through its form, consequently it had need to be created under some form: else it would not be in act. But when once it exists under one form it is in potentiality to others. On the other hand, the intellect does not receive substantial being through the intelligible species; and therefore there is no comparison."[414] Again, the difference with the *materia prima* is not in the potentiality regarding the forms; St. Thomas, in this article, is denying precisely that these forms are already present in the intellect. The difference between *materia prima* and intellect lies here in the metaphysical "level" of the real perfections that they receive: the *materia prima* is in potency to substantial forms, whereas the intellect, as accidental operative faculty and already existing in a substantial subject, can be in potency only to accidental forms (the species); also, the difference lies in the fact that the *materia prima* is in potency of other substantial forms, but it already has its own; whereas the intellect, existing already as an accidental faculty, is in potency to all forms, having originally none.[415] Finally, it is clear in the article that the

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creata a Deo sub speciebus intelligibilibus. Et sic anima intelligit corporalia per species sibi naturaliter inditas."

[414] 84, 3 ad 2: "Materia prima habet esse substantiale per formam, et ideo oportuit quod crearetur sub aliqua forma, alioquin non esset in actu. Sub una tamen forma existens, est in potentia ad alias. Intellectus autem non habet esse substantiale per speciem intelligibilem; et ideo non est simile."

[415] 84, 3, sc.: "*tabula rasa*."

species is the real subjective form *by which* the knowledge of corporeal things is attained. The reason for denying the original (innate) presence in the intellect of species as *forma quo* of knowing things, is the fact that this knowing itself is originally in potency, and *therefore* we are also in potency of those forms by which knowing is verified.[416] There is no confusion between object of knowing and species, even if both are strictly related.[417]

The comparison between intellect and *materia prima* regarding their receptivity appears again in 87, 1, c.: "Now the human intellect is only a potentiality in the genus of intelligible beings, just as primary matter is a potentiality as regards sensible beings; and hence it is called 'possible'."[418] In this and in the previous text,[419] however, the intellect is considered in potency of the species as subjective form; in 75, 5 ad 1, instead, the potentiality seems rather to refer to the form of the known (content). In both cases, still, it is clear that the intellect is in potency of knowing other things and, thus, receptive of their content as well.

Intellect and sensibility are considered "apprehensive" faculties.[420] In the following text, the apprehensive faculty (here "apprehensive" is cognitive as opposed to appetitive) is

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[416] Cf. 84, 3, c..

[417] More about this relationship will be said in the following, cf. p. 182.

[418] 87, 1, c.: "Intellectus autem humanus se habet in genere rerum intelligibilium ut ens in potentia tantum, sicut et materia prima se habet in genere rerum sensibilium, unde possibilis nominatur."

[419] 84, 3.

[420] "Apprehension" or similar words are used in other texts as well. Cf. 80, 2, c.: "Indeed, the passive power itself has its very nature from its relation to its active principle. Therefore, since what is apprehended by the intellect and what is apprehended by sense are generically different; consequently, the intellectual appetite is distinct from the sensitive." [… ipsa potentia passiva propriam rationem habet ex ordine ad suum activum. Quia igitur est alterius generis apprehensum per intellectum et apprehensum per sensum, consequens est quod appetitus intellectivus sit alia potentia a sensitivo.]; 83, 4, c., studied briefly in *Appendix*, Note 15.

brought to act in the reception of something. Here St. Thomas prefers to say *actus* rather than *actio*, the latter reserved for the appetitive act:

> For the act of the apprehensive power is not so properly called a movement as the act of the appetite: since the operation of the apprehensive power is completed in the very fact that the thing apprehended is in the one that apprehends: while the operation of the appetitive power is completed in the fact that he who desires is borne towards the thing desirable.[421]

But he says exactly the same thing, using the words *actio* – *actus* in the exact opposite way: "For as we have said above, the action of the intellect consists in this—that the idea of the thing understood is in the one who understands; while the act of the will consists in this—that the will is inclined to the thing itself as existing in itself."[422] In both cases, however, he is stressing that understanding is verified by the presence of the thing understood in the subject.

The word "apprehension" in reference to knowing appears also in the following text,[423] where it is clear that to apprehend means the opposite of possessing a form naturally. The form possessed naturally (be it accidental, as a faculty,[424] or substantial) is followed by a natural appetite, whereas the form that is apprehended is followed by a different kind of tendency, which is called "appetitive faculty." Thus, it is suggested again that knowing is receptive of a form which is not naturally in the subject:

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[421] 81, 1, c.: "Actus enim apprehensivae virtutis non ita proprie dicitur motus, sicut actio appetitus, nam operatio virtutis apprehensivae perficitur in hoc, quod res apprehensae sunt in apprehendente; operatio autem virtutis appetitivae perficitur in hoc, quod appetens inclinatur in rem appetibilem."

[422] 82, 3, c.: "Ut enim supra dictum est, actio intellectus consistit in hoc quod ratio rei intellectae est in intelligente; actus vero voluntatis perficitur in hoc quod voluntas inclinatur ad ipsam rem prout in se est."

[423] 80, 1, c..

[424] Cf. 80, 1 ad 3.

> Therefore, as forms exist in those things that have knowledge in a higher manner and above the manner of natural forms; so must there be in them an inclination surpassing the natural inclination, which is called the natural appetite. And this superior inclination belongs to the appetitive power of the soul, through which the animal is able to desire what it apprehends, and not only that to which it is inclined by its natural form.[425]

Knowing is verified by the possession of a form, but not as a form already possessed naturally. The intellect is informed (is perfected) by intelligible images of things abstracted from the senses:

> The likeness of nature is not a sufficient cause of knowledge; otherwise what Empedocles said would be true —that the soul needs to have the nature of all in order to know all. But knowledge requires that the likeness of the thing known be in the knower, as a kind of form thereof. Now our passive intellect, in the present state of life, is such that it can be informed with similitudes abstracted from phantasms: and therefore it knows material things rather than immaterial substances.[426]

The language of receptivity, this time in explicit comparison with the agent intellect, is also used in 88, 1, c. In this text, the distinction between possible intellect and agent intellect is as clear as it can be:

> As was shown above, the active intellect is not a separate substance; but a faculty of the soul, extending itself actively to the same objects to which the passive intellect

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[425] 80, 1, c.: "Sicut igitur formae altiori modo existunt in habentibus cognitionem supra modum formarum naturalium, ita oportet quod in eis sit inclinatio supra modum inclinationis naturalis, quae dicitur appetitus naturalis. Et haec superior inclinatio pertinet ad vim animae appetitivam, per quam animal appetere potest ea quae apprehendit, non solum ea ad quae inclinatur ex forma naturali."

[426] 88, 1 ad 2: "Similitudo naturae non est ratio sufficiens ad cognitionem, alioquin oporteret dicere quod Empedocles dixit, quod anima esset de natura omnium, ad hoc quod omnia cognosceret. Sed requiritur ad cognoscendum, ut sit similitudo rei cognitae in cognoscente quasi quaedam forma ipsius. Intellectus autem noster possibilis, secundum statum praesentis vitae, est natus informari similitudinibus rerum materialium a phantasmatibus abstractis, et ideo cognoscit magis materialia quam substantias immateriales." Cf. *De Ver* 2, 3, ad 9. The word "perfici" orients us in the same sense (knowing as reception), for example in 85, 4, c.: "Therefore it is impossible for one and the same intellect to be perfected at the same time by different intelligible species so as actually to understand different things." [Impossibile est ergo quod idem intellectus simul perficiatur diversis speciebus intelligibilibus, ad intelligendum diversa in actu.]

> extends receptively; because, as is stated,[427] the passive intellect is 'all things potentially,' and the active intellect is 'all things in act.' Therefore both intellects, according to the present state of life, extend to material things only, which are made actually intelligible by the active intellect, and are received in the passive intellect.[428]

In other places, St. Thomas refers to intellectual knowing as a kind of vision, perception, etc.. In 84, 7, c., precisely referring to the intellect's conversion to the phantasms, he says: "And, therefore, for the intellect to understand actually its proper object, it must of necessity turn to the phantasms in order to perceive the universal nature existing in the individual."[429] The verb "*speculari*" is used in place of "*intelligere*." The verb "*percipere*" is used in reference to understanding immediately after being used for sensible knowledge in 85, 2 ad 2:

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[427] *De Anima iii*, 5.

[428] 88, 1, c.: "Sexto, quia supra ostensum est quod intellectus agens non est substantia separata, sed virtus quaedam animae, ad eadem active se extendens, ad quae se extendit intellectus possibilis receptive, quia, ut dicitur in *III De Anima*, intellectus possibilis est quo est omnia fieri, intellectus agens quo est omnia facere. Uterque ergo intellectus se extendit, secundum statum praesentis vitae, ad materialia sola; quae intellectus agens facit intelligibilia actu, et recipiuntur in intellectu possibili." It is interesting that St. Thomas is not shy of calling the action of the agent intellect "intelligere", although in a hypothetical statement, in the text immediately following: "Hence in the present state of life we cannot understand separate immaterial substances in themselves, either by the passive or by the active intellect." [Unde secundum statum praesentis vitae, neque per intellectum possibilem, neque per intellectum agentem, possumus intelligere substantias immateriales secundum seipsas.] Finally, in what other way could the action of an intellect be described? But from here to saying that understanding for St. Thomas is an active performance, there is a long distance. For language of "receptivity", cf. also *Q.D. De Anima*, a.4, ad 5: "… [T]he species existing in the medium and in the sense is a particular and nothing more. The possible intellect, however, receives species of a higher genus than those present in the imagination; because the possible intellect receives universal species, whereas the imagination contains only particular species. Therefore we require an agent intellect in the case of intelligible things…" [… species in medio et in sensu non sit nisi particularis. Intellectus autem possibilis recipit species alterius generis quam sint in imaginatione; cum intellectus possibilis recipiat species universales, et imaginatio non contineat nisi particulares. Et ideo in intelligibilibus indigemus intellectu agente…]

[429] 84, 7, c.: "Et ideo necesse est ad hoc quod intellectus actu intelligat suum obiectum proprium, quod convertat se ad phantasmata, ut speculetur naturam universalem in particulari existentem."

> [We can see the point by a comparison with the senses]. For the sight sees the color of the apple apart from its smell […] but that it be perceived apart from the smell, this is owing to the sight, forasmuch as the faculty of sight receives the likeness of color and not of smell. In like manner humanity understood is only in this or that man; but that humanity be apprehended without conditions of individuality, that is, that it be abstracted and consequently considered as universal, occurs to humanity inasmuch as it is [perceived by] the intellect, in which there is a likeness of the specific nature, but not of the principles of individuality.[430]

The fact that St. Thomas uses the word "*percipere"* for both sensible and intellectual knowing is one more indication that for him knowing is receptive, a being perfected, and not a perfecting activity.

The object is that which perfects the faculty of knowing: "There must needs be some proportion between the object and the faculty of knowledge; such as of the active to the passive, and of perfection to the perfectible. Hence that sensible objects of great power are not grasped by the senses, is due not merely to the fact that they corrupt the organ, but also to their being improportionate to the sensitive power."[431] Nothing can be more clear than the characterization of knowing in general as a "being perfected":

> Now nothing is reduced from potentiality to act except by something in act; as the senses [are] made actual by what is actually sensible. We must therefore assign on the part of the intellect some power to make things actually intelligible, by

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[430] 85, 2 ad 2: "Et hoc possumus videre per simile in sensu. Visus enim videt colorem pomi sine eius odore […] sed quod sit sine odore *perceptus*, hoc accidit ei ex parte visus, inquantum in visu est similitudo coloris et non odoris. *Similiter* humanitas quae intelligitur, non est nisi in hoc vel in illo homine, sed quod humanitas *apprehendatur* sine individualibus conditionibus, quod est ipsam abstrahi, ad quod sequitur intentio universalitatis, accidit humanitatis secundum quod *percipitur* ab intellectu, in quo est similitudo naturae speciei, et non individualium principiorum." Cf. 84, 1, c., where similar expressions occur (quoted on p. 166).

[431] 88, 1 ad 3: "Requiritur aliqua proportio obiecti ad potentiam cognoscitivam, ut activi ad passivum, et perfectionis ad perfectibile. Unde quod excellentia sensibilia non capiantur a sensu, non sola ratio est quia corrumpunt organa sensibilia; sed etiam quia sunt improportionata potentiis sensitivis."

> abstraction of the species from material conditions. And such is the necessity for an active intellect.[432]

The act of the intelligence is the act of a passive potency needing an agent power in order to be actualized: "Our passive intellect is reduced from potentiality to act by some being in act, that is, by the active intellect, which is a power of the soul, as we have said; and not by a separate intelligence, as proximate cause, although perchance as remote cause."[433]

The same idea can be seen regarding the possible intellect (in the following text), but here the word "agent" is referring more directly to the intelligible species which can be impressed in the intellect: "Now nothing corporeal can make an impression on the incorporeal. And therefore in order to cause the intellectual operation according to Aristotle, the impression caused by the sensible does not suffice, but something more noble is required, for 'the agent is more noble than the patient,' as he says."[434]

The text of 84, 4 ad 3 (just quoted) raises an interesting question. Could we say that the intellect receives not the object itself, nor the species, but rather *the intellect's action*

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[432] 79, 3, c.: "Nihil autem reducitur de potentia in actum, nisi per aliquod ens actu, sicut sensus fit in actu per sensibile in actu. Oportebat igitur ponere aliquam virtutem ex parte intellectus, quae faceret intelligibilia in actu, per abstractionem specierum a conditionibus materialibus. Et haec est necessitas ponendi intellectum agentem."

[433] 84, 4 ad 3: "Dicendum quod intellectus noster possibilis reducitur de potentia ad actum per aliquod ens actu, idest per intellectum agentem, qui est virtus quaedam animae nostrae, ut dictum est, non autem per aliquem intellectum separatum, sicut per causam proximam; sed forte sicut per causam remotam." The distinction between agent intellect and possible intellect will be approached in section 6 of this *Chapter*.

[434] 84, 6, c.: "Nihil autem corporeum imprimere potest in rem incorpoream. Et ideo ad causandam intellectualem operationem, secundum Aristotelem, non sufficit sola impressio sensibilium corporum, sed requiritur aliquid nobilius, quia agens est honorabilius patiente, ut ipse dicit."

on the object? Is it not what Aquinas means, when he says that the agent intellect actualizes the possible? Is it not in this sense that the possible intellect is a passive potency? Let us proceed with some order. We have already shown that the object of intelligence, as *universal* content, is other than the intellect and is received as a *remedium* of its original poverty.[435] Therefore, it cannot be denied that, for St. Thomas, the intellect is receptive of the perfection of the object. As well, we have shown that the intellect is also in potency of its own (subjective) act, which is the species (in its real being). We have also shown that species and object are not the same, such that we understand the object, not the species.[436] Still, a question may remain. Is the species different from the action of the intellect? Insofar as the species is the form *by which* we understand something, that is, if we consider the species without its content, there is no difference between species and action of the intellect; indeed, the action of the intellect is the act *by which* we understand an object, which is also the definition of the species.[437] Now, we may distinguish them *in fieri* (*intelligere* is the act of understanding as proceeding from the faculty towards the object, *species* is the act of understanding as completed),[438] but because the action of the intellect is not a movement, *fieri* and *factum* are not distinct in reality. Now, is this *intelligere*

[435] Cf. section 1 of this *Chapter*.

[436] Cf. section 2 and 3 of this *Chapter*.

[437] And this is exactly the meaning of the Aristotelian identity, as we have seen in section 3 of this *Chapter*.

[438] Or rather the distinction is between the operation as such, in its essence (*intelligere*), abstracted from the object, and the operation *in facto esse*, where it cannot be separated from the species of the object, which is the subjective form of the intellect in act, and so the operation itself. We need to keep always in mind that understanding is an intentional operation, and therefore its act is on an object as such: it is not a physical operation that produces a modification in an object by means of its own movement, but rather it is the object that moves the potency to attain it as object, as other, as *it* is.

produced by the agent intellect? We could ask the same question in other words: is the agent intellect the cause of the species in the possible? In order to answer, we need to distinguish *species impressa* and *expressa* and, in both species, both content and the subjective being of the species.[439] In no case is the agent intellect cause of the content; instead, the agent intellect is cause of the abstracted mode of being of the content.[440] Is the agent intellect cause of the *species impressa* in its subjective being? Yes, it is: the result of the process of abstraction is the intelligible (not yet intellected) in act which, precisely because of its abstraction from matter, is able to be understood by the possible intellect.[441] This *species impressa*, however, is not the act of the possible intellect, but the "catalyst" of this act, the agent object which is able to actualize the possible intellect and will do so. Is the agent intellect the cause of the *species expressa*? It is cause of the agent object (the

[439] Cf. Stump, 267: "Although the abstracting of an intelligible species is the beginning or source of an act of intellection, that act of intellection is not complete until the intellect has used the intelligible species to form an intention" (she quotes extensively in support *CG I*, 53); Stump, 268-269: "The resulting [from abstraction] intelligible species are received spiritually by the potential intellect. Actualized in this way by the intelligible species, the intellect engages in a further act, transforming the intelligible species into a mental concept"; Francis A. Cunningham, "A Theory on Abstraction in St. Thomas," *Modern Schoolman: A Quarterly Journal of Philosophy* 35 (1958): 253, "It is the function of the possible intellect to receive these intelligible species and conceive the corresponding verbum"; *CG II*, 59, par. 14: "For colors existing outside the soul are in the presence of light actually visible, as having the power to move the sight; but are not actually (seen) in the sense of being actually perceived as the result of becoming one with the sense power in act. And similarly, phantasms are made actually intelligible by the light of the agent intellect, so that they are able to move the possible intellect; but not so as to be actually understood, through union with the possible intellect actualized." [Colores enim extra animam existentes, praesente lumine, sunt visibiles actu ut potentes movere visum: non autem ut actu sensata, secundum quod sunt unum cum sensu in actu. Et similiter phantasmata per lumen intellectus agentis fiunt actu intelligibilia, ut possint movere intellectum possibilem: non autem ut sint intellecta actu, secundum quod sunt unum cum intellectu possibili facto in actu.]

[440] Cf. *Chapter 1*, especially section 1 and 4, and *Chapter 2*; still, it is the main point of the dissertation, and so it will be shown more clearly in *Chapter 4*.

[441] Cf. 79, 3, c..

species impressa), and the agent object is cause of the act of the intellect *precisely* as agent object.[442] The agent intellect does not need to move the possible intellect in any other way because the possible intellect is already transcendentally ordered to its own object. It is the possible intellect itself that understands, that embraces intentionally (and thus possesses) the object which has been presented by the agent intellect.[443] It does not seem necessary to add a divine pre-motion to the possible intellect, but understanding should be considered as an *intentional* potency (that is, moved by its proper object) and not as a physical potency, needing to be moved by a cause in order to "reach" or "affect" the object. In any case, a divine influence should be supposed on the side of the agent intellect and of the agent object.

That the agent intellect is not the cause of an alleged action of the possible intellect on the phantasm has already been precluded by the fact that, for Aquinas, the action of the possible intellect is not on the phantasm: understanding is of the universal nature, not of the phantasm;[444] and the *conversio ad phantasmata* is not the act of understanding, but a mode of the act of understanding the universal nature.[445] The agent intellect could be

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[442] Cf. 87, 1, c.: "[Our intellect] understands itself according as it is made actual by the species abstracted from sensible things, through the light of the active intellect, which not only actuates the intelligible things themselves, but also, by their instrumentality, actuates the passive intellect. Therefore the intellect knows itself not by its essence, but by its act." [… consequens est ut sic seipsum intelligat intellectus noster, secundum quod fit actu per species a sensibilibus abstractas per lumen intellectus agentis, quod est actus ipsorum intelligibilium, et eis mediantibus intellectus possibilis. Non ergo per essentiam suam, sed per actum suum se cognoscit intellectus noster.]

[443] As far as I can see, it is not that the possible intellect produces the *expressa* as a different species, but rather it only "embraces" the species (the *impressa*) that is already there: in this sense, the *impressa* "becomes" the *expressa* when it is understood.

[444] Cf. *Chapter 1,* section 2.

[445] Cf. 84, 7, c.: "And, therefore, for the intellect to understand actually its proper object, it must of necessity turn to the phantasms in order to perceive the universal nature existing in the

considered as much cause of the *conversio* as it is cause of the act of understanding, that is, only insofar as it produces the *species impressa* and, strictly speaking, only insofar as it produces the abstracted mode of being of the universal nature.[446]

Some texts in which Aquinas seems to characterize knowing in an active way will now be examined but, first, a more "methodological" remark needs to be made. That is, St. Thomas is not overly concerned about technical words and expressions. He respects the normal use of words; words can be used in different senses, as long as a certain core of meaning is respected. Normally, one does not say "cold" when referring to "heat", but may say "cold" to refer not only to the weather, but also to an answer, or a personality. St. Thomas, by respecting this fact, makes his writings not more obscure, but more clear. If he had locked himself up in a world of technical expressions, he would have had to spend countless and useless pages defining his technicalities, and then always with the risk of not being understood. Instead, trusting in the understanding of the reader, he simply speaks humanly. He sometimes says the same thing twice, using different words; he may use a comparison, or he may use an opposition, to make sure that the reader understands what he means; and most importantly, he always begins by telling the reader what he is talking about, what the problem is, and what the solution is not, so that the reader, by the combination of so many "phantasms", may arrive at understanding him. This is not to suggest that understanding St. Thomas is particularly easy, nor that preparation is not

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individual." [Et ideo necesse est ad hoc quod intellectus actu intelligat suum obiectum proprium, quod convertat se ad phantasmata, ut speculetur naturam universalem in particulari existentem.]

[446] The text in 89, 5, c., referring to science as "acquired" and to the species remaining in the separate soul, may also help to show the receptive character of knowing.

needed to approach his text. However, one cannot take a phrase from St. Thomas to make a statement, and then say that it is so "because St. Thomas has said that it is so." Because what St. Thomas means is not bound to the words he uses, but is free, one must follow the living current of his thinking, and then express, not one's preferred thought about him, but what Aquinas is actually saying, in words meaningful to oneself and one's own time. This implies, of course, that there is *a meaning* behind the words, and that we, human beings that we are, have the ability to get behind the words and discover that meaning. Nowadays, many people think that this is not the case. However, St. Thomas appears to have composed his works thinking that this is precisely the case.

In the following text, then, St. Thomas refers to understanding as an action but, at the same time, not an action that perfects another thing. He is not denying that knowing refers to another thing as object, as he says in other places. However, if there is a reference to another, that reference is perfective of the subject, not of the object. It would be very difficult to use this text to affirm that knowing, for St. Thomas, is active, or to affirm that knowing does not imply alterity. The former is explicitly denied, and the latter is not said and does not follow.

> Secondly, because since Socrates is an individual in a nature of one essence composed of matter and form, if the intellect be not the form, it follows that it must be outside the essence, and then the intellect is [to] the whole Socrates as a motor to the thing moved. Whereas the act of intellect remains in the agent, and does not pass into something else, as does the action of heating. Therefore the action of understanding cannot be attributed to Socrates for the reason that he is moved by his intellect.[447]

[447] 76, 1, c.: "Secundo quia, cum Socrates sit quoddam individuum in natura cuius essentia est una, composita ex materia et forma; si intellectus non sit forma eius, sequitur quod sit praeter

A similar text follows, in which St. Thomas uses art (*ars factibilium*) rather than *calefactio* to differentiate between immanent and transient operations. Again, the denial of alterity is denial in the sense that knowing is not an activity perfecting another but, rather, a being perfected: "Now the ultimate perfection of the intellect consists in its own operation: for this is not an act tending to something else in which lies the perfection of the work accomplished, as building is the perfection of the thing built; but it remains in the agent as its perfection and act, as is said [in] Metaph. ix."[448] Again, in this text, in almost the same context, Aquinas uses "*actio*" for the transient actions, and "*actus*" instead for the intellect.

That the perfection of the intellect is, in one sense, the species and, in another sense, the object known, has already been said, but it bears repetition: epistemologically, species and object are strictly dependent on each other. The species, however, is *for the sake of the object*, and not the object for the sake of the species; it is understanding as receiving the perfection of other things which is the purpose of knowing (understanding as *remedium*). Still, it is *the perfection of the subject* which is the purpose of knowing; however, this is not a perfection bestowed, but a perfection realized in the intentional reception and possession of the other. Finally, *the ultimate perfection* of the subject is not in understanding the material-other but in understanding, through the corporeal things, the Author of the universe, at least in the Author's existence as first cause.

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essentiam eius; et sic intellectus comparabitur ad totum Socratem sicut motor ad motum. Intelligere autem est actio quiescens in agente, non autem transiens in alterum, sicut calefactio. Non ergo intelligere potest attribui Socrati propter hoc quod est motus ab intellectu."

[448] 87, 3, c.: "Ultima autem perfectio intellectus est eius operatio, non enim est sicut actio tendens in alterum, quae sit perfectio operati, sicut aedificatio aedificati; sed manet in operante ut perfectio et actus eius, ut dicitur in IX Metaphys.."

Other texts may give the same impression of understanding as an activity.[449] The intellect can be said to be the active principle of the sensibility in a metaphysical sense, because whatever is more perfect is principle of the imperfect, and the intellect is essentially more perfect than the senses. In a cognitional sense, or as receptive principles, however, the more imperfect potencies are principles of the higher ones, insofar as they provide, as it were, the material for the act of the latter:

> But since the essence of the soul is compared to the powers both as a principle active and final, and as a receptive principle, either separately by itself, or together with the body; and since the agent and the end are more perfect, while the receptive principle, as such, is less perfect; it follows that those powers of the soul which precede the others, in the order of perfection and nature, are the principles of the others, after the manner of the end and active principle. For we see that the senses are for the sake of the intelligence, and not the other way about. The senses, moreover, are a certain imperfect participation of the intelligence; wherefore, according to their natural origin, they proceed from the intelligence as the imperfect from the perfect. But considered as receptive principles, the more [imperfect] powers are principles with regard to the others; thus the soul, according as it has the sensitive power, is considered as the subject, and as [a certain] material with regard to the intelligence.[450]

Is Aquinas talking about the material ("*materiale quoddam*") for a perfecting activity? Here, St. Thomas is speaking not of the intellect as active and even agent principle of the senses (as in the first part of the article), but as receptive principle. He is also very

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[449] Besides the following texts, see *Appendix*, Note 16.

[450] 77, 7, c.: "Sed quia essentia animae comparatur ad potentias et sicut principium activum et finale, et sicut principium susceptivum, vel seorsum per se vel simul cum corpore; agens autem et finis est perfectius, susceptivum autem principium, inquantum huiusmodi, est minus perfectum, consequens est quod potentiae animae quae sunt priores secundum ordinem perfectionis et naturae, sint principia aliarum per modum finis et activi principii. Videmus enim quod sensus est propter intellectum, et non e converso. Sensus etiam est quaedam deficiens participatio intellectus, unde secundum naturalem originem quodammodo est ab intellectu, sicut imperfectum a perfecto. Sed secundum viam susceptivi principii, e converso potentiae imperfectiores inveniuntur principia respectu aliarum, sicut anima, secundum quod habet potentiam sensitivam, consideratur sicut subiectum et materiale quoddam respectu intellectus."

careful in adding "*quaedam*", "*quoddam*" and "*quodammodo*" throughout, in order not to be misunderstood. Aquinas' goal here is to show the interdependence between the human potencies in two ways. First, in a metaphysical – static way, the unity of the soul requires that the less perfect originates from the more perfect and, thus, there is a dependence in the realm of being and natural perfection. Second, in a dynamic – operative way, the act of the lower potencies is prior, and because of that, a certain principle of the act of the higher potencies; thus, the act of the senses is a condition of possibility of the act of the intelligence. This is the point. Aquinas later clarifies that the material cause of the senses is not enough, and an agency on the part of the intellect is required.[451] However, this does not make the intellect less receptive as a knowing faculty, as we have seen and will see again.

One article just prior to the introduction of the agent intellect, St. Thomas refers to the intellect as a passive potency with regard to every universal being, making a contrast between this passive potency and other potencies which are active:

> The agent is nobler than the patient, if the action and the passion are referred to the same thing: but not always, if they refer to different things. Now the intellect is a passive power in regard to the whole universal being: while the vegetative power is active in regard to some particular thing, namely, the body as united to the soul. Wherefore nothing prevents such a passive force being nobler than such an active one.[452]

This text helps to show that the agent intellect is not the potency of which St. Thomas is speaking here (he will later characterize both potencies as regarding the same

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[451] Cf. 84, 6.

[452] 79, 2 ad 3: "Agens est nobilius patiente, si ad idem actio et passio referantur, non autem semper, si ad diversa. Intellectus autem est vis passiva respectu totius entis universalis. Vegetativum autem est activum respectu cuiusdam entis particularis, scilicet corporis coniuncti. Unde nihil prohibet huiusmodi passivum esse nobilius tali activo."

but in different ways, one actively and the other passively);[453] and that the intellect is receptive of something different from the particular; and that the passivity of the intellect does not make it a lesser potency in the human soul.[454]

We may then conclude that, for Aquinas, knowing is not a perfecting activity, but an activity in which the perfection of something other than the subject perfects the subject itself, making the latter acquire a perfection it did not have, in a way that is not physical but intentional. The perfection of the object is received "passively", insofar as the subject grows with a perfection that did not belong to it, a perfection regarding which it was in potency, where "potency" means a capacity of receiving intentionally. The fact that this "passivity" cannot mean an absolute indifference—a dead openness into which anything could enter—can be explained by what Aquinas says about the natural appetite of the potency, by the proportion between potency and proper object, and mainly by the specific nature of knowing as opposed to physical processes.[455]

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[453] Cf. 88, 1, c.

[454] Aquinas has characterized knowing (and particularly understanding) as receptive in other works as well. See *Appendix*, Note 17.

[455] Cf. p. 149 ff. and p. 177, footnote 330. Other authors support our interpretation of knowing in Aquinas as receptive. Gilson would complain about an idealistic contamination of terms. "Invention" in human knowing does not mean "creation", but rather something like an "encounter" (cf. *RM* 110). Cf. Lambert, 85 (after talking about the infused knowledge of angels): "The possible intellect, on the other hand, knows nothing naturally and must acquire each one of its species separately"; 93: "The human intellect is originally empty and so must acquire the species which actuate it."

Sellés, instead, says that Aquinas does not admit the preceeding interpretations of the Aristotelian agent intellect because all of them conceive human knowing as passive, which in the mind of Sellés is unacceptable because knowing is an act (cf. *Crítica*, 224; *EIA*, 200, 246). I would suggest that one should distinguish between act as perfection received and act as perfection bestowed, i.e., between the act of a perfected passive potency and the act of a perfecting active potency (cf. *In II De Anima* 6, 123-138); and should also distinguish between the natural passivity of matter and the intentional receptivity of the knowing faculties. Passion and act are analogous concepts in the mind of Aquinas.

5) The Comparison between Intelligence and Sensitivity

The following group of texts regards the so frequent comparison in Aquinas between sensitivity and intelligence. For Kant, the intuition of the senses as reception of the material of experience is the way to ensure contact with reality and, thus, the objectivity of human understanding. Objectivity for Kant has to do with extramental reality, which is only particular, and the contact with that reality is by means of sensible intuition. Now human science is universal; universal concepts do not come from experience, because reality is particular; but universal concepts are applied to the particular. Therefore, in Kant's mind, human science has to be a subjective function, an activity, an application of subjective a priori categories to the objective reality of experience.

As we have seen, St. Thomas does not have the same point of departure and so, for him, sensibility and intelligence are not understood in the same way. For Aquinas, both sensibility and intelligence are receptive of the object – content. And for this reason, he does not hesitate to constantly compare intelligence with sensibility regarding the most important characteristics of knowing: alterity, receptivity, species, identity with regards to the species, objectivity, etc.. Once again, the goal here is to show how different is Aquinas' approach from any Kantian approach to Epistemology, and how for St. Thomas knowing has nothing to do with a perfecting activity.

The texts in this section show that, for Aquinas, sensibility and intelligence realise or fulfil the same basic notion of knowing, in which the content is a posteriori, that is to say, has its origin in experience. Because of this, it seems, intellectual and sensible knowing are constantly likened to each other in many aspects.

In 85, 2 ad 2 several similarities between senses and intelligence can be seen. The first is that the object of knowing is in reality but, insofar as it is known, possesses another mode of being in the faculty: "… the nature itself […] is only in individuals; but [its being] understood […] is in the intellect."[456] and "… the color which is seen is only in the apple: but that it be perceived apart from the smell, this is owing to the sight."[457] The second is that knowing is verified by means of a species, an image, that is present in the faculty: "… the faculty of sight receives the likeness of color and not of smell."[458] and "… in [the intellect] there is a likeness of the specific nature, but not of the principles of individuality."[459] The third is that, in both cases, knowing is called "perception": "… that it be perceived apart from the smell, this is owing to the sight…"[460] and "inasmuch as it is [perceived by] the intellect…"[461] The text flows nicely in its complete form.[462]

Helpful in showing another interesting comparison between sensibility and intelligence is our other *textus princeps*, 79, 3. Both faculties are receptive and in potency of their respective objects; moreover, the similarity with vision goes even further since, for both intellect and vision, a light is required for the object to be visible. From the first objection the comparison is explicit: "For as the senses are to things sensible, so is our

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[456] "Ipsa igitur natura […], non est nisi in singularibus; sed hoc ipsum quod est intelligi […] est in intellectu."

[457] "Color qui videtur, non est nisi in pomo; sed quod sit sine odore perceptus, hoc accidit ei ex parte visus."

[458] "… [I]n visu est similitudo coloris et non odoris."

[459] "… [P]ercipitur ab intellectu, in quo est similitudo naturae speciei, et non individualium principiorum."

[460] "… [Q]uod sit sine odore perceptus, hoc accidit ei ex parte visus…"

[461] "… [S]ecundum quod percipitur ab intellectu…"

[462] Cf. 85, 2 ad 2, quoted on p. 86.

intellect to things intelligible."[463] Granted, however, a similarity to some extent, an agent sense is not required*:* "Sensible things are found in act outside the soul; and hence there is no need for an active sense."[464] In fact, although in both cases the faculty is in potency, and although both faculties are reduced to their proper act by something in act (the sensible or the intelligible object), in the case of intelligence the object is not intelligible in act and, for this reason, an agent intellect is required:

> Now nothing is reduced from potentiality to act except by something in act; as the senses [are] made actual by what is actually sensible. We must therefore assign on the part of the intellect some power to make things actually intelligible, by abstraction of the species from material conditions. And such is the necessity for an active intellect.[465]

Let us now consider the response to the second objection. If the first opinion regarding the role of light in vision is accepted, then vision and intelligence are similar in one more respect, that being the necessity of a light making their respective objects knowable in act. St. Thomas says: "There are two opinions as to the effect of light. For some say that light is required for sight, in order to make colors actually visible. And according to this the active intellect is required for understanding, in like manner and for the same reason as light is required for seeing."[466] Regardless of the doctrine of light, which will be

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[463] 79, 3, ob. 1: "Sicut enim se habet sensus ad sensibilia, ita se habet intellectus noster ad intelligibilia."

[464] 79, 3 ad 1: "Sensibilia inveniuntur actu extra animam, et ideo non oportuit ponere sensum agentem."

[465] 79, 3, c.: "Nihil autem reducitur de potentia in actum, nisi per aliquod ens actu, sicut sensus fit in actu per sensibile in actu. Oportebat igitur ponere aliquam virtutem ex parte intellectus, quae faceret intelligibilia in actu, per abstractionem specierum a conditionibus materialibus. Et haec est necessitas ponendi intellectum agentem."

[466] 79, 3 ad 2: "Circa effectum luminis est duplex opinio. Quidam enim dicunt quod lumen requiritur ad visum, ut faciat colores actu visibiles. Et secundum hoc, similiter requiritur, et propter idem, intellectus agens ad intelligendum, propter quod lumen ad videndum."

examined in more detail later, it is clear that the similarity between the intentional receptivity of intelligence and of vision is the greatest possible.

In 78, 1, c.,[467] both potencies are said to refer to the extra-mental reality, and in both cases this reference is verified by means of a species.

The Aristotelian identity (which, for St. Thomas, as we have seen, regards the identity of the species with the faculty) applies to both intelligence and sensibility: "The thing understood is in the intellect by its own likeness; and it is in this sense that we say that the thing understood [in act] is the intellect in act, because the likeness of the thing understood is the form of the intellect, as the likeness of a sensible thing is the form of the sense in act." [468] The role of the species is, in both cases, the same: "The intelligible species is to the intellect what the sensible image is to the sense. But the sensible image is not what is perceived, but rather that by which sense perceives. Therefore the intelligible species is not what is actually understood, but that by which the intellect understands."[469] The act of vision and the act of understanding are considered equally immanent actions: "There is a twofold action (Metaph. ix), one which remains in the agent; for instance, to see and to understand; and another which passes into an external object; for instance, to heat and to

[467] Text quoted and translated p. 69.

[468] 85, 2 ad 1: "Intellectum est in intelligente per suam similitudinem. Et per hunc modum dicitur quod intellectum in actu est intellectus in actu, inquantum similitudo rei intellectae est forma intellectus; sicut similitudo rei sensibilis est forma sensus in actu." Cf. ob. 1.

[469] 85, 2, sc.: "Species intelligibilis se habet ad intellectum, sicut species sensibilis ad sensum. Sed species sensibilis non est illud quod sentitur, sed magis id quo sensus sentit. Ergo species intelligibilis non est quod intelligitur actu, sed id quo intelligit intellectus."

cut; and each of these actions proceeds in virtue of some form."[470] St. Thomas takes the similarity even further asserting that, in both sensibility and intelligence, there is a "double operation", one which is strictly receptive and another which is formative and more active:

> There are two operations in the sensitive part. One, in regard of impression only, and thus the operation of the senses takes place by the senses being impressed by the sensible. The other is formation, inasmuch as the imagination forms for itself an image of an absent thing, or even of something never seen. Both of these operations are found in the intellect.[471]

A clarification is in order. Although the text just quoted shows how similar are sense and intellect for Aquinas, it seems that this text should be understood not as referring to the receptivity of the content but, rather, to the receptivity of the species as agent object (*species impressa*). In that case, definition is understood as the formation of the *species expressa* by the possible intellect in the simple apprehension. This would be in line with the consideration of the definition as simple.[472] It would also imply that the first *species expressa* in sensitivity is formed not in the external senses, but in the imagination. If we want to say that Aquinas refers "formation" only to judgment, then Aquinas implies in this text that the definition already presupposes a composition (of specific difference and genus); but the text seems to oppose *ratio* and *compositio*. In any case, the word "formation" cannot be taken to mean "activity" in the sense of providing content but,

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[470] 85, 2, c.: "Cum enim sit duplex actio, sicut dicitur IX Metaphys., una quae manet in agente, ut videre et intelligere, altera quae transit in rem exteriorem, ut calefacere et secare; utraque fit secundum aliquam formam."

[471] 85, 2 ad 3: "In parte sensitiva invenitur duplex operatio. Una secundum solam immutationem, et sic perficitur operatio sensus per hoc quod immutatur a sensibili. Alia operatio est formatio, secundum quod vis imaginativa format sibi aliquod idolum rei absentis, vel etiam nunquam visae. Et utraque haec operatio coniungitur in intellectu."

[472] This is more evident, for example, in *In VII Metaphysicorum*, lect. 11, n. 1528; lect. 12, 1537, 1541, 1554-1556.

rather, the intentional actualization of the faculty by means of the agent object. Only in this second moment (of *formation*, not *impression*) does the "reception" (as possession) of the content take place. Knowing is this intentional "activity of reception" and the difficulty of Epistemology is to grasp this fact as *different* from *physical* activities and receptions.

Let us examine other texts.[473] Both kinds of faculties are apprehensive but their respective objects are formally different: "Indeed, the passive power itself has its very nature from its relation to its active principle. Therefore, since what is apprehended by the intellect and what is apprehended by sense are generically different; consequently, the intellectual appetite is distinct from the sensitive."[474]

The clear acknowledgement of the differences between intellect and sense does not conflict with the aforementioned similarities. What St. Thomas says in 84, 4 ad 2: "Material things, as to the being which they have outside the soul, may be actually sensible, but not actually intelligible. Wherefore there is no comparison between sense and intellect."[475] is

[473] For St. Thomas, both faculties are equally in potency to their respective objects, in such a way that the Aristotelian *quodammodo omnia* applies to both. Cf. 84, 2 ad 2: "Aristotle did not hold that the soul is actually composed of all things, as did the earlier philosophers; he said that the soul is all things, 'after a fashion,' forasmuch as it is in potentiality to all—through the senses, to all things sensible—through the intellect, to all things intelligible." [… Aristoteles non posuit animam esse actu compositam ex omnibus, sicut antiqui naturales; sed dixit quodammodo animam esse omnia, inquantum est in potentia ad omnia; per sensum quidem ad sensibilia, per intellectum vero ad intelligibilia.] The *quodammodo omnia* referred to both faculties had already appeared in 80, 1, where they are also similar in their alterity, in the reception of species of their objects and in being apprehensive faculties as opposed to appetitive faculties (cf. 80, 1, c., ob. 2 y ad 2).

[474] 80, 2, c.: "Ipsa potentia passiva propriam rationem habet ex ordine ad suum activum. Quia igitur est alterius generis apprehensum per intellectum et apprehensum per sensum, consequens est quod appetitus intellectivus sit alia potentia a sensitive."

[475] 84, 4 ad 2: "Res materiales, secundum esse quod habent extra animam, possunt esse sensibiles actu; non autem actu intelligibiles. Unde non est simile de sensu et intellectu."

clearly understood by what we have already seen in 79, 3 (the necessity of an agent intellect) and other texts, for example:

> But there is this difference, according to the opinion of Aristotle, between the sense and the intelligence—that a thing is perceived by the sense according to the disposition which it has outside the soul—that is, in its individuality; whereas the nature of the thing understood is indeed outside the soul, but the mode according to which it exists outside the soul is not the mode according to which it is understood.[476]

Why, then, does St. Thomas say in 84, 4 ad 2 that "there is no comparison between sense and intellect"? The second objection is based on the alleged parallel between sense and intellect regarding the relationship of the object to the potency. This parallel, however, is misconstrued in the following way: as the sensible in act (the real corporeal thing, object of knowledge) is the cause of the sensible species actualizing the sense (as *forma quo*), in the same way the intelligible species actualizing the intellect must be caused by the intelligible in act (understood as real spiritual beings existing outside the mind). St. Thomas' answer puts things in order: the object of human knowledge is the corporeal thing, not the separate substances. The corporeal things have a *mode of being* outside the mind which allows them to be sensible in act and, therefore, the corporeal things can actualize the senses as objects. However, because these corporeal, real things are not intelligible in act, they cannot actualize the intelligence in the same way. For Aquinas, that which is dissimilar is not the relationship between object and potency (once the object is in act, both potencies are actualized by the object in the same way), but the condition of the object in reality (i.e.

[476] 76, 2 ad 4: "Sed hoc tantum interest inter sensum et intellectum, secundum sententiam Aristotelis, quod res sentitur secundum illam dispositionem quam extra animam habet, in sua particularitate, natura autem rei quae intelligitur, est quidem extra animam, sed non habet illum modum essendi extra animam, secundum quem intelligitur."

its mode of being). That is why St. Thomas says in 76, 2 ad 4 that this (i.e., the mode of being of the object in reality) is the "only" difference between sense and intelligence.

The texts reported reinforce the idea of human understanding as intentionally receptive, and not different from the sense in this respect. Knowing, for Aquinas, certainly has two species (sensible and intelligible), or even two levels of perfection in human being, but a common generic characteristic which is knowing as a being perfected by the formal perfection of the real-other as other. In order for that formal perfection to perfect the knower, it has to be knowable in act. In the case of the object of intelligence, because it does not subsist as knowable in act, there arises the need for an agent intellect.[477]

6) Corollaries: Agent Intellect, Possible Intellect and Will

The notions of intellectual knowing as an activity and of the agent intellect as a formal a priori tend to blur the distinctions between the possible intellect, the agent intellect and the will itself. The reasons are not difficult to understand.

On a rather superficial level, if understanding is active as performative, the possible intellect (Thomistically the faculty of understanding) necessarily ceases to be receptive; unless by "reception" something like an "encounter" with the sensible material is meant, and therefore "reception" and "conversion to the particular" actually mean the same thing. The path for the identification of agent intellect with possible intellect is thus open. Also, because tending towards reality-in-itself is the Thomistic property of the appetite, and because there is no reality other than the one encountered by the spirit in its openness to

[477] For the comparison between intellect and senses in other works of Aquinas, see *Appendix*, Note 18.

the (material) world, it is not difficult to see how this "being-in-the-world" is at the same time "understanding" and "tending towards reality," "conversion" and "decision."

On a deeper level, the reason for the effacement of the distinction between the potencies is the effacement of the distinction between being and operation, or the reduction of being to action. Being (*ens*) becomes first being known: this is Modern Philosophy's approach to being, that is, the reduction of being to being of consciousness. This being known, then, turns out to be the result of an active performance (knowing is performance of the object), and the only "being" (*esse ut actus*) left to this object of consciousness is that performance (action) itself. In other words, the being known (the object of consciousness) is a composite of material of sensibility plus performance or intellectual activity;[478] intelligibility is the action of intelligence on the phantasm. The unity of the act of understanding is the unity of the object. The being of judgment is the being of the object, and so being (*esse ut actus objecti*) is action (*esse ut actio subjecti*).[479]

One more step. If being is merely being affirmed, what is the being of the subject, if not this affirmation itself? The subject is not like other beings, but is in itself this performance: being-in-the-world. In this way, the being of the subject also is reduced to its own action. Now, this identification of being and operation is foreign to the mind of St. Thomas: it is precisely Aquinas' distinction between essence and being, and the consequent distinction between *esse* and *operari*, that is the characteristic of created being. In any case,

[478] The thrust of this doctrine can be found in Kant, *KRV*, B 1-2.

[479] This is, in my view, one of the reasons why the Aristotelian identity is interpreted sometimes as identity subject-object.

this has been said in order to try to show why, in Modern Philosophy, the distinction between intellectual potencies tends to disappear.

The immediate purpose of this section is to highlight the explicit distinction in Aquinas among agent intellect, possible intellect and will, this distinction being simply a consequence of what has been said so far regarding the nature of human understanding as intentionally receptive of the perfection of the other. There is certainly a place for activity (as opposed to "receptivity" as it is understood in this *Chapter*) in Aquinas, but this activity is not originally the capacity to understand. This activity is previous, as a metaphysical condition of possibility of understanding, in the case of the agent intellect; and it is posterior, as an inclination to the apprehended form, in the case of the will.

Let us show first some texts about the distinction between intellect and will, and then between the possible intellect and the agent intellect.

- Distinction between intellect and will. Treating the appetitive potencies in general, Aquinas is clear in stating that they must be distinct from the cognitive potencies, despite the fact that the objects might be the same in reality. What necessitates a distinction of potencies is the *formal* distinction of the objects. In 80, 1, the second objection says: "Powers are differentiated by their objects. But what we desire is the same as what we know. Therefore the appetitive power is not distinct from the apprehensive power."[480] The answer: *"*What is apprehended and what is desired are the same in reality, but differ in aspect: for a thing is apprehended as something sensible or intelligible,

[480] 80, 1, ob. 2: "Potentiae distinguuntur secundum obiecta. Sed idem est quod cognoscimus et appetimus. Ergo vim appetitivam non oportet esse aliam praeter vim apprehensivam."

whereas it is desired as suitable or good."[481] The appetitive potency is distinct also because its act is made possible by the act of the apprehensive faculty. In other words, the apprehended form is the condition of possibility of the appetitive inclination; but this apprehended form implies that the cognitive act is already completed and performed; therefore the capacity of this inclination depends essentially on the performed act of cognition, for which the respective capacities, though essentially related, must be essentially distinct. Another way to see this is to understand the concepts: to apprehend is an act finishing in the subject, whereas an inclination is an act finishing in the thing outside the mind; the reason the knower can tend towards the thing is that the thing has entered the knower's horizon of possibilities. This "entrance" of the thing is knowing, and the tendency towards the known thing is the appetite. In the following passage, for example, we can see 1) the distinction between the substantial form and the cognitive form (being and operation), and the consequent distinction between natural appetite and the appetite that follows cognition; and 2) the act of knowing as condition of possibility of the act of the appetite ("the animal is able to desire what it apprehends"):

> Therefore, as forms exist in those things that have knowledge in a higher manner and above the manner of natural forms; so must there be in them an inclination surpassing the natural inclination, which is called the natural appetite. And this superior inclination belongs to the appetitive power of the soul, through which the animal is able to desire what it apprehends, and not only that to which it is inclined by its natural form.[482]

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[481] 80, 1 ad 2: "Id quod apprehenditur et appetitur, est idem subiecto, sed differt ratione, apprehenditur enim ut est ens sensibile vel intelligibile; appetitur vero ut est conveniens aut bonum."

[482] 80, 1, c.: "Sicut igitur formae altiori modo existunt in habentibus cognitionem supra modum formarum naturalium, ita oportet quod in eis sit inclinatio supra modum inclinationis

The fact that both knowing and appetite are passive potencies for Aquinas[483] does not erase the distinction between apprehending and the act of the appetite. In fact, what moves the appetite is the object as apprehended. This is so much so that the condition of the object as (already) apprehended (intellectually or sensibly) qualifies and distinguishes the appetitive potencies.[484] For Aquinas, because there is a formal difference between that which the subject apprehends through intelligence and that which the subject apprehends through sense, there is also a distinction between the intellectual appetite and the sensitive appetite.

Despite the fact that both are passive, and as passive can be said to be "moved" by their objects, the qualification of "movement" does not fit so well the act of knowing as it does the act of the appetite. There is a clear distinction between the operations:

> For the act of the apprehensive power is not so properly called a movement as the act of the appetite: since the operation of the apprehensive power is completed in the very fact that the thing apprehended is in the one that apprehends: while the operation of the appetitive power is completed in the fact that he who desires is borne towards the thing desirable.[485]

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naturalis, quae dicitur appetitus naturalis. Et haec superior inclinatio pertinet ad vim animae appetitivam, per quam animal appetere potest ea quae apprehendit, non solum ea ad quae inclinatur ex forma naturali."

[483] 80, 2, c..

[484] Cf. also 80, 2, ob. 1 and ad 1.

[485] 81, 1, c.: "Actus enim apprehensivae virtutis non ita proprie dicitur motus, sicut actio appetitus, nam operatio virtutis apprehensivae perficitur in hoc, quod res apprehensae sunt in apprehendente; operatio autem virtutis appetitivae perficitur in hoc, quod appetens inclinatur in rem appetibilem." Cf. 82, 3, c.: "For as we have said above, the action of the intellect consists in this—that the idea of the thing understood is in the one who understands; while the act of the will consists in this—that the will is inclined to the thing itself as existing in itself." [Ut enim supra dictum est, actio intellectus consistit in hoc quod ratio rei intellectae est in intelligente; actus vero voluntatis perficitur in hoc quod voluntas inclinatur ad ipsam rem prout in se est.]

The explicit distinction between apprehensive and appetitive faculties, for Aquinas, is not a figure of speech, nor two ways of speaking of the same reality, nor even two aspects of the same phenomenon. The act of the appetite presupposes and follows the act of the apprehensive faculty; the objects are formally different, and the acts that reach out to those objects are also formally different, and even opposed. For Aquinas, "to apprehend" and "to tend towards" are not the same and, therefore, the faculties that regard those operations need to be distinct.

- Distinction between agent intellect and possible intellect. The distinction between agent intellect and possible intellect is also explicit in Aquinas: "Nevertheless there is a distinction between the power of the active intellect and of the passive intellect: because as regards the same object, the active power which makes the object to be in act must be distinct from the passive power, which is moved by the object existing in act."[486] It is clear that the action of the passive potency can begin when the action of the active potency finishes; once the object is available (by the action of the agent intellect), the other potency can be moved by it.

[486] 79, 7, c.: "Diversificatur tamen potentia intellectus agentis, et intellectus possibilis, quia respectu eiusdem obiecti, aliud principium oportet esse potentiam activam, quae facit obiectum esse in actu; et aliud potentiam passivam, quae movetur ab obiecto in actu existente." So there must be two potencies in this sense, but clearly not two apprehensive potencies in the intelligence, cf. 82, 5, c.: "And therefore in the will, which is the intellectual appetite, there is no differentiation of appetitive powers, so that there be in the intellectual appetite an irascible power distinct from a concupiscible power: just as neither on the part of the intellect are the apprehensive powers multiplied, although they are on the part of the senses." [Et ideo non diversificantur in ipsa, quae est appetitus intellectivus, aliquae potentiae appetitivae, ut sit in appetitu intellectivo alia potentia irascibilis, et alia concupiscibilis, sicut etiam ex parte intellectus non multiplicantur vires apprehensivae, licet multiplicentur ex parte sensus.]

Let us explore similar texts: “Our passive intellect is reduced from potentiality to act by some being in act, that is, by the active intellect, which is a power of the soul, as we have said; and not by a separate intelligence, as proximate cause, although perchance as remote cause.”[487] It is obvious that what is attributed to the agent intellect is the capacity of actualizing the intellect which is passive, something which, if it does not need to be attributed to another separate intellect, can certainly not be attributed to the same faculty of understanding; St. Thomas introduces the agent intellect as a faculty of the soul precisely because whatever is in potency cannot be reduced to act if not by something that is actual. Moreover, the agent intellect does not even directly actualize the possible intellect, but does so through the species. The agent intellect is to be considered more precisely the act of the intelligible (in an efficient sense, producing the intelligible mode of being) and the species (*impressae*) themselves that which actualize the possible intellect as agent object:

> [Our intellect] understands itself according as it is made actual by the species abstracted from sensible things, through the light of the active intellect, which not only actuates the intelligible things themselves, but also, by their instrumentality, actuates the passive intellect. Therefore the intellect knows itself not by its essence, but by its act.[488]

[487] 84, 4 ad 3: “Dicendum quod intellectus noster possibilis reducitur de potentia ad actum per aliquod ens actu, idest per intellectum agentem, qui est virtus quaedam animae nostrae, ut dictum est, non autem per aliquem intellectum separatum, sicut per causam proximam; sed forte sicut per causam remotam.”

[488] 87, 1, c.: “… consequens est ut sic seipsum intelligat intellectus noster, secundum quod fit actu per species a sensibilibus abstractas per lumen intellectus agentis, quod est actus ipsorum intelligibilium, et eis mediantibus intellectus possibilis. Non ergo per essentiam suam, sed per actum suum se cognoscit intellectus noster.”

The point of the article is to deny that the intellect can understand itself by itself, precisely because it is in potency. The agent intellect, instead, which could be considered "act," is not itself the object but rather the active principle of the truly intelligible objects:

> The essence of an angel is an act in the genus of intelligible things, and therefore it is both intellect and the thing understood. Hence an angel apprehends his own essence through itself: not so the human mind, which is either altogether in potentiality to intelligible things—as is the passive intellect—or is the act of intelligible things abstracted from the phantasms—as is the active intellect.[489]

It is clear that neither the possible intellect nor the agent intellect are "an act in the genus of intelligible things" because St. Thomas is opposing the human intellect (and here he includes both faculties) to the angelic intellect in that respect. But, the distinction between the two human faculties is also clear: the possible intellect is absolutely in potency regarding the intelligible objects, in potency of receiving them; and the agent intellect is "act" in a certain sense, but not insofar as it is itself intelligible (*intelligibilium* is plural here), but insofar as it is the active principle of the intelligible objects.[490]

In 83, 4, ob. 3 and ad 3, we see again the word "*intellectus*" applied to the intellectual faculties in general and, at the same time, their distinction as "two potencies": "The will is the intellectual appetite. But in the intellect there are two powers—the active and the passive."[491] The objection is not challenged in that regard; the possible intellect

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[489] 87, 1 ad 2: "Essentia angeli est sicut actus in genere intelligibilium, et ideo se habet et ut intellectus, et ut intellectum. Unde Angelus suam essentiam per seipsum apprehendit. Non autem intellectus humanus, qui vel est omnino in potentia respectu intelligibilium, sicut intellectus possibilis; vel est actus intelligibilium quae abstrahuntur a phantasmatibus, sicut intellectus agens."

[490] The agent intellect as *actus intelligibilium* will be treated in more detail in *Chapter 4,* section 1.

[491] 83, 4, ob. 3: "Voluntas est appetitus intellectivus. Sed ex parte intellectus sunt duae potentiae, scilicet agens et possibilis."

needs a moving object which is not in act unless the agent intellect actualizes it; for this reason, there are two potencies in the intellectual part of the mind. But regarding the will, another potency is not required because the moving object is already in the intellect: "The intellect is compared to the will as moving the will. And therefore there is no need to distinguish in the will an active and a passive will."[492]

In the same way, the mention of "two" potencies recurs in 85, 1, ob. 4, the objection which gives St. Thomas the opportunity to distinguish two "activities" in the agent intellect itself (illumination and abstraction). St. Thomas, in his answer, does not challenge the distinction of two potencies, nor the denial of the attribution of abstraction to the possible: he *adds* to the agent intellect one more activity, other than the one already attributed in the objection. The objection says:

> The Philosopher says (De Anima iii, 5) there are two things in the intellectual soul—the passive intellect and the active intellect. But it does not belong to the passive intellect to abstract the intelligible species from the phantasm, but to receive them when abstracted. Neither does it seem to be the function of the active intellect, which is related to the phantasm, as light is to color; since light does not abstract anything from color, but rather streams on to it. Therefore in no way do we understand by abstraction from phantasms.[493]

The answer begins: "Not only does the active intellect throw light on the phantasm: it does more; by its own power it abstracts the intelligible species from the

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[492] 83, 4 ad 3: "Intellectus comparatur ad voluntatem ut movens. Et ideo non oportet in voluntate distinguere agens et possible."

[493] 85, 1, ob. 4: "Ut dicitur in *III De Anima*, in intellectiva anima sunt duo, scilicet intellectus possibilis, et agens. Sed abstrahere a phantasmatibus species intelligibiles non pertinet ad intellectum possibilem, sed recipere species iam abstractas. Sed nec etiam videtur pertinere ad intellectum agentem, qui se habet ad phantasmata sicut lumen ad colores, quod non abstrahit aliquid a coloribus, sed magis eis influit. Ergo nullo modo intelligimus abstrahendo a phantasmatibus."

phantasm."[494] The rest of this interesting passage will occupy us in the next *Chapter*. What is important is that St. Thomas accepts the challenge of the objection; that is, that there are only two potencies; now, if neither of them does the job, there is no abstraction. The solution is that one of them does it, and allows the other to be actualized with the fruit of its own (the agent intellect's) work.[495]

The real distinction in Aquinas is sustained by metaphysical principles, not by a figure of speech.[496] Potencies are distinct when their formal objects are distinct. Potencies are distinct when one is productive of something that the other only receives. St. Thomas speaks about "*duo*." It is true that the soul does not have matter, for Aquinas, and therefore these two distinct potencies cannot be pictured as different places or instruments in a machine; however, neither can one surrender to the temptation of imagining them as just one big current towards the world. They are different, accidental, formal perfections of the one soul, united substantially in the soul and having between them a certain order which preserves in addition an operational unity. But there is a real distinction. Distinctions in Aquinas are important and, sometimes, real. For him, for example, the distinction between essence and (created) being is real, although it is impossible to separate them in reality. The reason for a real distinction, then, is not that two things cannot *be imagined* separately

[494] 85, 1 ad 4: "Phantasmata et illuminantur ab intellectu agente; et iterum ab eis, per virtutem intellectus agentis, species intelligibiles abstrahuntur."

[495] The distinction between agent intellect and possible intellect is present in other works of Aquinas. See *Appendix*, Note 19.

[496] In a different context, but perhaps relevant to the point, cf. *In I De Anima* 6, 92-94: "Now in any self-mover there are two things to be considered, the thing moving, and the thing moved; and the former cannot as such be the same as the latter." [In movente etiam seipsum duo sunt: unum movens, et aliud motum: et impossibile est quod illud quod est movens moveatur per se.]

from each other, but that one of them cannot be the other; a real distinction is grounded in the essence of each member and in the principle of non-contradiction. For this reason, if one understands what each of these potencies means for Aquinas, one realizes that they cannot be the same faculty, although they subsist in the same intellectual soul.

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In the present *Chapter*, the intention has been to show the receptive character of knowing in the sense of a reception of an object – content and, therefore, knowing as perfective of the subject in its radical original imperfection. The connection with our previous findings is not difficult to see. The object of intelligence is the intelligible nature of things, which is a perfection subsisting materially in the corporeal things themselves, and different from their principle of individuation. This intelligible perfection, even if it is not intelligible in act, is present in the things themselves; the key to understanding this is the distinction between intelligible as perfection – content (distinct in turn from the sensible content) and intelligible as mode of being of the content. This is also the sense in which knowing is receptive: because the perfection – content belongs to the thing itself, not to the intellect, the soul is in potency of this kind of perfection and, therefore, grows with its reception.

All of this needed to be said in order to show that, for Aquinas, the agent intellect is not a formal a priori, which would be seen in the object as its perfection – content. Had it not been shown that the intelligible is a perfection belonging to the thing itself and different from its sensible content, it would not have been clear that the object of intelligence is, at the same time, the particular thing and the universal (because the universal *as content*

subsists in the particular thing). Had it not been shown that intelligible in Aquinas is understood in two senses (the state of abstraction and the *quidditas*), it would not have been clear in what sense an intelligible perfection subsists in a material thing. At the same time, had it not been shown that understanding is receptive of the intelligible as content, it could have been said that the intelligible content is present in the material thing as belonging to it *because of the activity* of understanding.

At the same time, as seems clear, these findings help in explaining the agent intellect as a metaphysical a priori of intellectual knowing as receptive of objective content, that is, as productive of the intelligible mode of being of the intelligible content. What remains to be said will be introduced in the next *Chapter*.

Chapter Four: The Thomistic Agent Intellect as a Metaphysical A Priori rather than a Formal A Priori

This is the moment to take advantage of the previous clarifications to address more directly the main question of this research: is the agent intellect to be understood as a formal a priori of knowing as an activity of performance or, rather, as a metaphysical a priori of intellectual knowing as receptive of objective content? That intellectual knowing in Aquinas is not productive but intentionally receptive has already been addressed directly. What must now be addressed is the precise characterization of the agent intellect in the text of Aquinas as a metaphysical rather than a formal a priori.

A formal a priori in intellectual knowing is basically productive of the universal – intelligible content as such. It is a subjective function which "makes" or "creates" the intellectual object of knowing by a certain organization or in-formation of the material data of sensible experience. It gives "form" to the "matter" provided by the senses, it organizes the raw material of sensible experience and so, in this sense, makes it intelligible. The basic assumption is that the unity that characterizes the object of human understanding cannot come from experience, for the simple reason that experience is considered a phenomenon without unity, as in Kant. The origin of that unity is therefore a priori, and the one responsible for that unity is the subject. The universal, the one in the many, is the result of a subjective function. It seems that this subjective function could be related to the Thomist agent intellect. The question before us is: can this relationship be grounded in the text of St. Thomas?

This *Chapter* is divided into two sections. In the first, we will examine some texts that may *seem* to support the claim of Aquinas' agent intellect as a formal a priori. In the second, we will examine some of the texts that support the view of this research, that the agent intellect is a metaphysical a priori.

1) The Text of St. Thomas: the Agent Intellect as a Formal A Priori?

We will present two groups of texts. The first group regards several characterizations of the human intellect that may seem to support the claim of a formal a priori in human understanding (in general). The second group deals directly with texts that may seem to suggest that this formal a priori is specifically the agent intellect.

1.1. Infinity in the Human Intellect

The intellect is infinite in a certain sense. Is this infinity a "virtual" infinity, pre-containing in itself the perfection-content of the known? It does not seem so in Aquinas' text.

The human intellect can be said to be "infinite" only in potency, and in potency of receiving: "Therefore infinity is potentially in our mind through its considering successively one thing after another: because never does our intellect understand so many things, that it cannot understand more."[497] There is nothing like a habitual knowing of the infinite, because it would suppose the actual knowing of the infinite, which for St. Thomas is impossible:

> For the same reason we cannot have habitual knowledge of the infinite: because in us habitual knowledge results from actual consideration: since by understanding we

[497] 86, 2, c.: "Et ideo in intellectu nostro invenitur infinitum in potentia, in accipiendo scilicet unum post aliud, quia nunquam intellectus noster tot intelligit, quin possit plura intelligere."

> acquire knowledge, as is said Ethic. ii, 1. Wherefore it would not be possible for us to have a habit of an infinity of things distinctly known, unless we had already considered the entire infinity thereof, counting them according to the succession of our knowledge: which is impossible.[498]

In *Objection Four*, the fact that the intellect is an infinite virtue (infinite = not determined by matter, subsistent in itself) is taken to imply that it is an infinite virtue in a different sense, i.e., as actively infinite, with an infinite active potential on infinite things. In the answer, St. Thomas concedes the first point of the objection, but clarifies in what precise sense that infinity (as non-determination by matter) implies an infinity in the object: because the object also is non-determined by matter (the *quidditas* in its abstraction), it can be called "infinite", insofar as it can be understood or predicated of infinite individuals. The infinity of this universal is not an "intensive" infinity (including in itself all the perfections of the individuals) but an infinity of indetermination (it is not determined to this or that individual, but it *can* refer to all of them). The complete text of the *Ad quartum* says:

> As our intellect is infinite in power, so does it know the infinite. For its power is indeed infinite inasmuch as it is not terminated by corporeal matter. Moreover it can know the universal, which is abstracted from individual matter, and which consequently is not limited to one individual, but, considered in itself, extends to an infinite number of individuals.[499]

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[498] 86, 2, c.: "Et eadem ratione non possumus intelligere infinita in habitu. In nobis enim habitualis cognitio causatur ex actuali consideratione, intelligendo enim efficimur scientes, ut dicitur in *II Ethic*. Unde non possemus habere habitum infinitorum secundum distinctam cognitionem, nisi consideravissemus omnia infinita, numerando ea secundum cognitionis successionem, quod est impossibile."

[499] 86, 2 ad 4: *"Sicut* intellectus noster est infinitus virtute, *ita* infinitum cognoscit. Est enim virtus eius infinita, secundum quod non terminatur per materiam corporalem. Et est cognoscitivus universalis, quod est abstractum a materia individuali, et per consequens non finitur ad aliquod individuum, sed, quantum est de se, ad infinita individua se extendit."

Therefore, infinity in human intellect could be understood in two senses: first, as an infinite potency of receiving; second, as a potency of receiving something infinite, meaning now by infinite "undetermined to this or that individual."

It could be helpful to consider that, for Aquinas, the only potency that pre-contains virtually all perfection (as an active principle, as efficient cause) is the essence of God: "The First Act is the universal principle of all acts; because It is infinite, virtually 'precontaining all things,' as Dionysius says (Div. Nom. v)."[500] The essence of God is, for St. Thomas, distinct from creatures, insofar as God is intensive fullness of perfection, and the creatures participate that perfection. The text just quoted continues:

> Wherefore things participate of It not as a part of themselves, but by diffusion of Its processions. Now as potentiality is receptive of act, it must be proportionate to act. But the acts received which proceed from the First Infinite Act, and are participations thereof, are diverse, so that there cannot be one potentiality which receives all acts, as there is one act, from which all participated acts are derived; for then the receptive potentiality would equal the active potentiality of the First Act.[501]

It is in this sense, as one intensive act which the multiple things participate, that God is pure act and that the creatures are imperfect acts, mixed with their respective (multiple) potencies. The text, once the misconception of "(one) pure potency" has been discarded, continues by distinguishing the intellectual potency from the *materia prima*, as (both) receptive (but) of different kinds of forms: "Now the receptive potentiality in the

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[500] 75, 5 ad 1: "Primus actus est universale principium omnium actuum, quia est infinitum, virtualiter in se omnia praehabens, ut dicit Dionysius."

[501] 75, 5 ad 1: "Unde participatur a rebus, non sicut pars, sed secundum diffusionem processionis ipsius. Potentia autem, cum sit receptiva actus, oportet quod actui proportionetur. Actus vero recepti, qui procedunt a primo actu infinito et sunt quaedam participationes eius, sunt diversi. Unde non potest esse potentia una quae recipiat omnes actus, sicut est unus actus influens omnes actus participatos, alioquin potentia receptiva adaequaret potentiam activam primi actus."

intellectual soul is other than the receptive potentiality of first matter, as appears from the diversity of the things received by each. For primary matter receives individual forms; whereas the intelligence receives absolute forms."[502] What is important for us is the distinction between the active potency of God, containing *virtualiter* all perfection, and any other created potency, characterized as receptive (insofar as created potencies participate the first intensive act); and the precise characterization of the intellect as receptive of absolute forms, that is to say, the universals.

Therefore the infinity of possibilities of the human intellect regards first of all the possibility of always receiving more in time: "… through its considering successively one thing after another: because never does our intellect understand so many things, that it cannot understand more."[503] Then, it implies the formal infinity of the universal received, that in itself can be referred to infinite individuals: "Moreover it can know the universal, which is abstracted from individual matter, and which consequently is not limited to one individual…"[504] It is in any case an infinite capacity of reception, and not an active or virtual potentiality, pre-containing the perfection of the known.[505] It should be clear, however, that

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[502] 75, 5 ad 1: "Est autem alia potentia receptiva in anima intellectiva, a potentia receptiva materiae primae, ut patet ex diversitate receptorum, nam materia prima recipit formas individuales, intellectus autem recipit formas absolutas."

[503] 86, 2, c.: "… in accipiendo scilicet unum post aliud, quia nunquam intellectus noster tot intelligit, quin possit plura intelligere."

[504] 86, 2 ad 4: "Et est cognoscitivus universalis, quod est abstractum a materia individuali, et per consequens non finitur ad aliquod individuum…"

[505] When I speak about this objective "pre-containing" I certainly have in mind the language of pre-apprehension in some interpretations of Aquinas, but I am not addressing them directly. In order to address them, a clarification of what is meant by "pre-apprehension" in these interpretations would be necessary, and that is not the purpose of this dissertation. It is important, for example, to understand in what sense they speak of object, which cannot be simply identified with content: "Now this pre-apprehension itself does not attain to any object [and note 27] Coreth:

St. Thomas is here speaking of the possible intellect. But, because the agent intellect is sometimes not properly distinguished from the possible intellect, and the texts themselves can be used to support the counterclaim, the clarification seems useful.

Other works of Aquinas may help to confirm the proposed interpretation. In the following text of the *Contra Gentiles*, no separate substance (except God Himself) can be a sufficient principle of the knowledge of all things. The angels themselves need to receive intelligible content from infused species in order to know things other than themselves. This doctrine strongly suggests that the agent intellect does not precontain in some sort all intelligible content.

> We must, therefore, consider that, since none of these substances is by its essence a sufficient principle of the knowledge of all other things, there must accrue to each of them, over and above its own substance, certain intelligible likenesses, whereby each of them is enabled to know another in its proper nature. […] But such a likeness of all being, can be nothing other than an infinite nature: a nature not determined to some species or genus of being, but the universal principle of all being and the power productive of all being; and this, as was shown in Book I, is the divine nature alone. Indeed, no other nature can be the universal likeness of all being, since every nature except God is limited to some genus and species of being.[506]

'Knowing about something else, about an object in the oppostition of subject and object is a derivative, not the original sense of knowing'" (Cullen, 77). We would also need to understand a notion of being that is in some way subjective: "In posing this question, however, Rahner also argues that man is already with being in its totality. If man were not, he could not ask about being" (Cullen, 74).

[506] *CG II*, 98, par. 8-9: "Considerandum est igitur quod, cum nulla huiusmodi substantiarum secundum suam essentiam sit sufficiens principium cognitionis omnium aliarum rerum, unicuique earum, supra propriam substantiam, *oportet superaddere quasdam intelligibiles similitudines*, per quas quaelibet earum aliam in propria natura cognoscere possit […] Talis autem *similitudo totius entis esse non potest nisi natura infinita*, quae non determinatur ad aliquam speciem vel genus entis, sed est universale principium et virtus activa totius entis: qualis est sola natura divina, ut in primo ostensum est. *Omnis autem alia natura, cum sit terminata ad aliquod genus et speciem entis, non potest esse universalis similitudo totius entis*."

St. Thomas denies, as we have seen, any actuality of the species to the intellect in itself: "It follows that the soul as a whole is not the 'place' of forms, but only that part of it which lacks a bodily organ, i.e. the intellect; and even this part does not, as such, possess them actually, but potentially only."[507] It would be Platonic to affirm that the soul possesses all science already, as if it were habitually: "This is against […] Plato's opinion that the human soul is by nature in possession of a universal knowledge which only its union with the body has caused it to forget. (This theory is implicit in Plato's reduction of learning to remembering.)"[508]

That the agent intellect does not precontain the known can be taken from the following text also. The objection provides the context for the following answer:

> Further, in order to have activity, an agent and a patient alone are necessary. Therefore, if the possible intellect, which is the patient in cognition, is a part of our substantial principle, as was previously shown, and the agent intellect is also a part of our soul, it seems that we possess within ourselves everything necessary in order that we may be able to understand.[509]
>
> Although our soul possesses an agent and a possible intellect, nevertheless something extrinsic is required so that we may be able to understand. First of all, indeed, we need phantasms, derived from sensible things, by means of which the likenesses of particular (*determinatarum*) things are presented to the intellect. For the agent intellect is not an act in which the determinate species of all things [are present in order to know], any more than light can [determine sight to particular

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[507] *In III De Anima* 1, 233-236: "Non dicendum est, quod tota anima sit locus specierum, sed solum pars intellectiva, quae organum non habet. Nec ita est locus specierum, quod habeat actu species, sed potentia tantum."

[508] *In III De Anima* 3, 53-60: "Et per hoc excluditur […] opinio Platonis, qui posuit naturaliter animam humanam habere omnem scientiam, sed esse eam quodammodo oblitam, propter unionem ad corpus: dicens, quod addiscere nihil aliud est quam reminisci." We will examine later the meaning of the soul as "*quodammodo omnia*."

[509] *Q.D. De Anima*, a.5, ob. 6: "Ad actionem aliquam non requiritur nisi agens et patiens. Si igitur intellectus possibilis, qui se habet ut patiens in intelligendo est aliquid substantiae nostrae, ut prius monstratum est, et intellectus agens est aliquid animae nostrae; videtur quod in nobis sufficienter habeamus unde intelligere possimus."

> (*determinatas*) kinds of colors, unless those same colours determining sight are present.][510]

The following text[511] is a very clear indication that, for Aquinas, the agent intellect does not precontain the intelligible content. The question is whether the agent intellect is one for all human beings or each has his or her own agent intellect. The objection wants to relate the actuality of the agent intellect to the actuality of the intelligible content: either the agent intellect possesses the content which will be impressed on the possible intellect (and so there is no need of abstraction), or it does not; but if it does not possess the content, it cannot produce the content by abstraction because, in order to find what one is searching for, there needs to be some previous idea (= content) of it.

> If the agent intellect is a part of the soul, it must either be created clothed or filled with species: and in that case it places those species also in the possible intellect, and will not need to abstract intelligible species from the phantasms; or else it is created naked and lacking in species: and in that case it will not be effectually able to abstract species from phantasms, because it will not recognize that species which it is seeking, after it has abstracted it, unless it previously had some notion of it.[512]

Aquinas' answer explicitly rejects the idea that the agent intellect be related to the content. To possess the content or not is proper to the knowing faculty, which is not the

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[510] *Q.D. De Anima*, a.5 ad 6: "Dicendum quod licet in anima nostra sit intellectus agens et possibilis, tamen requiritur aliquid extrinsecum ad hoc quod intelligere possimus. Et primo quidem requiruntur phantasmata a sensibilibus accepta, per quae repraesententur intellectui rerum determinatarum similitudines. *Nam intellectus agens non est talis actus in quo omnium rerum species determinatae accipi possint ad cognoscendum*; sicut nec lumen determinare potest visum ad species determinatas colorum, nisi adsint colores determinantes visum."

[511] *De Spirit. Creat.*, a.10, ob. 15 et ad 15.

[512] *De Spirit. Creat.*, a.10, ob. 15: "Si intellectus agens est aliquid animae, oportet quod vel sit creatus vestitus seu opulentus speciebus, et sic illas species ponit etiam in intellectum possibilem, et non indigebit abstrahere species intelligibiles a phantasmatibus; aut creatus est nudus et carens speciebus, et sic non erit efficax ad abstrahendum species a phantasmatibus, quia non cognoscet illam quam quaerit, postquam eam abstraxerit, nisi prius aliquam rationem habuerit."

agent intellect but the possible intellect. For Aquinas, the agent intellect does not in any way precontain the intelligible content:[513]

> It is incorrect to say that the agent intellect is naked or clothed, full of species or empty of them. For to be filled with species is characteristic of the possible intellect, but to cause them is characteristic of the agent intellect. Now it must not be said that the agent intellect understands in isolation from the possible intellect, but that the man understands by means of both…[514]

1.2. "*Quodammodo omnia*"

This Aristotelian phrase could also be used to support the idea that the intellect pre-contains in some way the known. Some recurrences of this phrase will be noted, with Aquinas' corresponding explanations. The most important, perhaps, is the following because it relates this characteristic of human knowing to God as pre-containing the perfection of everything:

> But in those things which have knowledge, each one is determined to its own natural being by its natural form, in such a manner that it is nevertheless receptive of the species of other things: for example, sense receives the species of all things sensible, and the intellect, of all things intelligible, so that the soul of man is, in a way, all things by sense and intellect: and thereby, those things that have knowledge, in a way, approach to a likeness to God, 'in Whom all things pre-exist,' as Dionysius says.[515]

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[513] That the origin of the content is in sensibility will be more specifically treated in this *Chapter*, section 2.

[514] *De Spirit. Creat.*, a.10 ad 15: "Inconvenienter dicitur intellectus agens nudus vel vestitus plenus speciebus vel vacuus. Impleri enim speciebus est intellectus possibilis sed facere eas est intellectus agentis. Non est autem dicendum quod intellectus agens seorsum intelligat ab intellectu possibili: sed homo intelligit per utrumque…"

[515] 80, 1, c.: "In habentibus autem cognitionem, sic determinatur unumquodque ad proprium esse naturale per formam naturalem, quod tamen est receptivum specierum aliarum rerum, sicut sensus recipit species omnium sensibilium, et intellectus omnium intelligibilium, ut sic anima hominis sit omnia quodammodo secundum sensum et intellectum, in quo quodammodo cognitionem habentia ad Dei similitudinem appropinquant, in quo omnia praeexistunt, sicut Dionysius dicit."

As has already been suggested,[516] it is clear that *quodammodo omnia* implies specifically the capacity of receiving all sensible and intelligible perfections proportionate to these potencies. It is also clear that, in this way, the beings possessing knowledge *come closer* to the perfection of God insofar as they progress from the possession of their own specific form only to the possession of other forms as well. The similarity (*quodammodo*) comes from the fact that those perfections, now *intentionally* present in the knower, were already *virtually* contained in God.

It seems better to interpret this text as talking about the actual reception of the known perfections, rather than as talking about merely the potency of receiving them. If this is the case, then the text means "*ut sic anima hominis sit omnia quodammodo*," that is to say, "*sic*" = by receiving the species of all sensible and intelligible objects. This interpretation would make better sense of the similarity with God "*in quo omnia praeexistunt*" in act (because the merely potential similarity would be a lesser similarity) and of the progress implied by the word "*appropinquant*" (although it could also mean a static-metaphysical proximity).

This Aristotelian phrase, however, is used by Aquinas in other instances with the precise meaning of the soul being all things *in potency*. In 84, 2, *Objection Two* requires that the soul knows the corporeal things by itself. The reason is that the soul is all things and, therefore, has also the nature of the corporeal things, and since knowing is by the like, *ergo*: "The Philosopher says (De Anima iii, 8) that 'the soul, after a fashion, is everything.' Since, therefore, like is known by like, it seems that the soul knows corporeal things through

[516] Cf. *Chapter 3*, sections 1, 3 and 5.

itself."[517] But Aristotle, according to Aquinas, does not mean to say that the soul is all things as if it would have the perfection of all things in act:

> Aristotle did not hold that the soul is actually composed of all things, as did the earlier philosophers; [518] he said that the soul is all things, 'after a fashion,' forasmuch as it is in potentiality to all—through the senses, to all things sensible—through the intellect, to all things intelligible.[519]

For Aquinas, the mistake made by the Natural Philosophers is not only that the known is actual in the knower, but that this actuality is "natural," that is to say, that the perfection of the known is in the knower with a real and natural being (the first mode of being of *De Ver.* 2, 2). Still, Aquinas' point is that the soul, in knowing, is all things only in potency, and as much in potency of the sensible as of the intelligible. That this potency is potency of receiving rather than an active potency has already been shown in the previous text. In any case, the Aristotelian text as used by Aquinas does not support the idea of the intellect as "pre-containing" in a certain way the perfection of the known: potency of receiving content (even every possible content) implies precisely that the content is not yet in the potency itself. For Aquinas, the possible intellect can also be "*tabula rasa"* exactly because it is all things only "*quodammodo*." That to be in potency of something is to pre-

[517] 84, 2, ob. 2: "Philosophus dicit, in *III De Anima,* quod *anima quodammodo est omnia.* Cum ergo simile simili cognoscatur, videtur quod anima per seipsam corporalia cognoscat."

[518] Cf. *In I De Anima* 12, 8-16.

[519] 84, 2 ad 2: "Aristoteles non posuit animam esse actu compositam ex omnibus, sicut antiqui naturales; sed dixit quodammodo animam esse omnia, inquantum est in potentia ad omnia; per sensum quidem ad sensibilia, per intellectum vero ad intelligibilia."

contain it, in a certain sense, might also be said, but such an explanation does not seem to foster a better understanding of Aquinas.[520]

That, for Aquinas, the intellect is "*tabula rasa*" insofar as it does not precontain any of its objects, can be taken from other works as well.[521] It is not difficult to find agreement with other authors.[522]

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[520] That the soul is "*quodammodo omnia*" in potency only is clear also in *In III De Anima* 7, 28-36; cf. *In III De Anima* 7, 54-61 (where the comparison with the senses in the receptivity of the forms of all things can also be seen); *In III De Anima* 1, 170-180 (see text in *Appendix*, Note 23).

[521] Cf. *In III De Anima* 1, 131-139: "Anything that is in potency with respect to an object, and able to receive it into itself, is, as such, without that object; thus the pupil of the eye, being potential to colours and able to receive them, is itself colourless. But our intellect is so related to the objects it understands that it is in potency with respect to them, and capable of being affected by them (as sense is related to sensible objects). Therefore it must itself lack all those things which of its nature it understands." (translator's parentheses) [Omne enim, quod est in potentia ad aliquid et receptivum eius, caret eo ad quod est in potentia, et cuius est receptivum; sicut pupilla, quae est in potentia ad colores, et est receptiva ipsorum, est carens omni colore: sed intellectus noster sic intelligit intelligibilia, quod est in potentia ad ea et susceptivus eorum, sicut sensus sensibilium: ergo *caret omnibus illis rebus quas natus est intelligere.*]; *In III De Anima* 3, 45-53: "And [there is also] the change which implies nothing more than a reception of forms from outside the changed thing. The mind, then, is called passive just in so far as it is in potency, somehow, to intelligible objects which are not actual in it until understood by it. It is like a sheet of paper on which no word is yet written, but many can be written. Such is the condition of the [possible] intellect, so long as [nothing of the intelligible objects is actual in it, but only in potency]." [Et est aliquod pati, quod dicitur secundum receptionem tantum. Intellectus igitur dicitur pati, inquantum est quodammodo in potentia ad intelligibilia, et nihil est actu eorum antequam intelligat. Oportet autem hoc sic esse, sicut contingit in tabula, in qua nihil est actu scriptum, sed plura possunt in ea scribi. Et hoc etiam accidit intellectui possibili, quia *nihil intelligibilium est in eo actu*, sed potentia tantum.]; *Q.D. De Anima*, a.2, ob. 17; *De Spirit. Creat*., a.9, c. (these two last texts in *Appendix*, Note 24).

[522] Cf. Lambert, 85 (after talking of the infused knowledge of angels): "The posible intellect, on the other hand, knows nothing naturally and must acquire each one of its species separately"; 93: "The human intellect is originally empty and so must acquire the species which actuate it"; Sellés (cf. *EIA*, 272) places among the "Thomistic negations regarding the agent intellect" the claim that it "does not have in itself any intelligible species."

1.3. The Process of Learning

Is not the process of learning a proof that science (as what is known objectively) comes, in a certain sense, from ourselves? In fact, when we learn, we do not receive infused species from our teacher. If those new ideas do not come from ourselves, where do they come from? We will refer to two texts of Aquinas that may be enlightening.

The first one is from the article where Aquinas denies that we understand things by innate ideas. The third objection will point out that, by means of questions in an orderly fashion, a person who had not previously acquired certain knowledge responds truly (as one knowing) about what is being questioned. The answer of St. Thomas is the following: "If questions be put in an orderly fashion they proceed from universal self-evident principles to what is particular. Now by such a process knowledge is produced in the mind of the learner. Wherefore when he answers the truth to a subsequent question, this is not because he had knowledge previously, but because he thus learns for the first time."[523] The text seems to suggest that the questions provoke the right phantasm which allows the disciple to learn *ex novo* what he did not know before. The other text appears to point in the same direction:

> Secondly, anyone can experience this of himself, that when he tries to understand something, he forms certain phantasms to serve him by way of examples, in which as it were he examines what he is desirous of understanding. For this reason it is that when we wish to help someone to understand something, we lay examples before him, from which he forms phantasms for the purpose of understanding.[524]

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[523] 84, 3 ad 3: "Ordinata interrogatio procedit ex principiis communibus per se notis, ad propria. Per talem autem processum scientia causatur in anima addiscentis. Unde cum verum respondet de his de quibus secundo interrogatur, hoc non est quia prius ea noverit; sed quia tunc ea *de novo addiscit*."

[524] 84, 7, c.: "Secundo, quia hoc quilibet in seipso experiri potest, quod quando aliquis conatur aliquid intelligere, format aliqua phantasmata sibi per modum exemplorum, in quibus quasi inspiciat quod intelligere studet. Et inde est etiam quod quando alium volumus facere aliquid intelligere, proponimus ei exempla, ex quibus sibi phantasmata formare possit ad intelligendum."

For Aquinas, it seems evident that, because the light of the agent intellect is connatural and cannot fail, yet requires a sensible phantasm to abstract, true understanding of things is possible only as long as the right phantasm is formed. The phenomenon of teaching is not explained by the presence of innate ideas, nor by the infusion of species; rather, teaching is the art of helping the learner to form the right phantasm, so that the learner's own interior light (the agent intellect) abstracts the idea which was already in the mind of the teacher, and is present, by way of the latter's *art*, in the phantasm produced for the learner. In any case, there is no indication that Aquinas is suggesting a pre-comprehension or implicit knowledge of things in these texts.[525]

1.4. The Natural Desire to Know

One might be tempted to use the natural desire to know in Aquinas' text as a basis for suggesting a formal a priori. It is true that what is desired must be known in a certain sense and, therefore, a natural desire to know things does seem to imply a certain knowledge of them.

Aquinas always makes a clear distinction between the natural appetite and the appetite which follows an apprehension:

[525] Cf. also the text previously studied (title: "Infinity in the human intellect"), *De Spirit. Creat*., a.10, ob. 15 et ad 15. In *CG II*, 75, par. 15 we find similar reflections: "And by proposing sensible examples, from which the phantasms necessary for the disciple's understanding [may be formed] in the soul. And since the outward action of the teacher would have no effect without the inward principle of knowledge, whose presence in us we owe to God…" [Proponendo exempla sensibilia, ex quibus in anima discipuli formentur phantasmata necessaria ad intelligendum. Et quia exterior operatio docentis nihil operaretur nisi adesset principium intrinsecum scientiae, quod inest nobis divinitus…] The latter *principium* is the agent intellect, which is necessary on the side of the subject in order to make the phantasms intelligible.

> Some inclination follows every form: for example, fire, by its form, is inclined to rise, and to generate its like. Now, the form is found to have a more perfect existence in those things which participate knowledge than in those which lack knowledge. For in those which lack knowledge, the form is found to determine each thing only to its own being—that is, to its nature. Therefore this natural form is followed by a natural inclination, which is called the natural appetite.[526]

The natural appetite is that which follows the natural form: it is a certain tendency towards preserving that form's being, and towards the things that are natural to that form (for the fire to go up, in the example). The appetite following an apprehension is the tendency towards the apprehended form, not *as* known (in which sense it is already possessed) but as real, as the perfection of the other which is fitting to the subject. Moreover, the natural appetite follows every natural form, be that form substantial or accidental. That is why the natural appetite belongs as well to the intellectual faculty: intelligence desires its own perfection with natural appetite. Aquinas says:

> The 'natural appetite' is that inclination which each thing has, of its own nature, for something; wherefore by its natural appetite each power desires something suitable to itself. But the 'animal appetite' results from the form apprehended; this sort of appetite requires a special power of the soul—mere apprehension does not suffice. For a thing is desired as it exists in its own nature, whereas in the apprehensive power it exists not according to its own nature, but according to its likeness. Whence it is clear that sight desires naturally a visible object for the purpose of its act only—namely, for the purpose of seeing; but the animal by the appetitive power desires the thing seen, not merely for the purpose of seeing it, but also for other purposes. But if the soul did not require things perceived by the senses, except on account of the actions of the senses, that is, for the purpose of sensing them; there would be

[526] 80, 1, c.: "Quamlibet formam sequitur aliqua inclinatio, sicut ignis ex sua forma inclinatur in superiorem locum, et ad hoc quod generet sibi simile. Forma autem in his quae cognitionem participant, altiori modo invenitur quam in his quae cognitione carent. In his enim quae cognitione carent, invenitur tantummodo forma ad unum esse proprium determinans unumquodque, quod etiam naturale uniuscuiusque est. Hanc igitur formam naturalem sequitur naturalis inclinatio, quae appetitus naturalis vocatur."

> no need for a special genus of appetitive powers, since the natural appetite of the powers would suffice.[527]

Also, in this latter text, it is clear both that the natural appetite does not imply a distinct faculty, and that the appetite following apprehension, in fact, needs a distinct faculty. Further, there is no confusion between the natural appetite of the object and the appetitive faculty, because what is desired in each case is formally different: the object in order to know (the perfection of the cognitive faculty itself), versus the object in itself (the perfection of the object as fitting to the subject *also* in other respects). Significantly, the appetitive faculty can *also* desire to know something, but in this case knowing is desired as a particular good of the subject, rather than for the good of the faculty itself. Similar reflections are found in the following text:

> Each power of the soul is a form or nature, and has a natural inclination to something. Wherefore each power desires by the natural appetite that object which is suitable to itself. Above which natural appetite is the animal appetite, which follows the apprehension, and by which something is desired not as suitable to this or that power, such as sight for seeing, or sound for hearing; but simply as suitable to the animal.[528]

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[527] 78, 1 ad 3: "Ad tertium dicendum quod appetitus naturalis est inclinatio cuiuslibet rei in aliquid, ex natura sua, unde naturali appetitu quaelibet potentia desiderat sibi conveniens. Sed appetitus animalis consequitur formam apprehensam. Et ad huiusmodi appetitum requiritur specialis animae potentia, et non sufficit sola apprehensio. Res enim appetitur prout est in sua natura, non est autem secundum suam naturam in virtute apprehensiva, sed secundum suam similitudinem. Unde patet quod visus appetit naturaliter visibile solum ad suum actum, scilicet ad videndum, animal autem appetit rem visam per vim appetitivam, non solum ad videndum, sed etiam ad alios usus. Si autem non indigeret anima rebus perceptis a sensu, nisi propter actiones sensuum, scilicet ut eas sentiret; non oporteret appetitivum ponere speciale genus inter potentias animae, quia sufficeret appetitus naturalis potentiarum."

[528] 80, 1 ad 3: "Dicendum quod unaquaeque potentia animae est quaedam forma seu natura, et habet naturalem inclinationem in aliquid. Unde unaquaeque appetit obiectum sibi conveniens naturali appetitu. Supra quem est appetitus animalis consequens apprehensionem, quo appetitur aliquid non ea ratione qua est conveniens ad actum huius vel illius potentiae, utpote visio ad videndum et auditio ad audiendum; sed quia est conveniens simpliciter animali."

What is the perfection desired by intelligence with natural appetite? It is its natural perfection as faculty, that is to say, to understand. The intellect desires to know; the will, instead, desires what is known, once it is known. The intellect desires to know as a subjective perfection (natural appetite); the will desires the known as an objective perfection (appetite following apprehension). The intellect's transcendental orientation to know and, in that sense, to know things, is simply its nature, that which makes it "intellect." The natural desire or tendency, then, comes from the fact that the intellect is able to know, a potency of knowing. This natural tendency does not imply that the intellect already knows; the tendency is there from the beginning while the intellect still does not know, and is still there once it has known.[529]

Moreover, this natural desire to know should not be confounded with the conscious desire which one may have to always know more.[530] In the mind of Aquinas, although this latter desire could be called "natural," insofar as it is according to human nature, it evidently presupposes knowledge. The only natural intellectual desire previous to knowledge is the natural appetite, and this natural appetite, in the text of Aquinas, does not imply any formal anticipation of the object. In other words, for Aquinas, the appetite which

[529] This is true insofar as the natural appetite applies also to the form that is possessed.

[530] A further distinction may be made between the desire of knowing more about an object (say, more about Mathematics) or of simply knowing more, being "more learned." In both cases, this appetite implies knowledge, and although this is according to the natural appetite, it seems to me that knowing is desired more as a good of the subject than as a good of the faculty itself. In the first case, the drive to know more about the object seems more like a natural desire (as a desire of knowing Mathematics); but because what is desired is knowing Mathematics as something good, or better said, the good of knowing Mathematics (say, for the "pleasure" it implies), I think it would be more accurate to say that it is an elicit desire of the will. It could be granted, still, that the faculty which knows Mathematics will also "desire" to know more of it with natural appetite, and will "repose" in the possession of its knowledge; but it does not seem that this desire can be identified with the conscious or elicit desire.

implies knowledge is not the natural appetite of the intellect, but the will; and the natural appetite of the intellect is not the appetite of the object in itself, but the appetite of the faculty's perfection. The distinction between content and mode of being in the species here proves crucial in understanding the mind of St. Thomas.

1.5. "*Naturaliter nota vel indita*"

Despite the clear indications that, for Aquinas, there are no innate ideas, his affirmation of principles naturally known or "included" (*indita*) in the mind may raise the question of a certain "objective" presence of those principles in the intellect previous to any act of knowing. Relevant texts to be examined now follow.

In 79, 12, c., it is clear that, for St. Thomas, there are some naturally known principles from which reasoning must begin:

> Man's act of reasoning, since it is a kind of movement, proceeds from the understanding of certain things—namely, those which are naturally known without any investigation on the part of reason, as from an immovable principle—and ends also at the understanding, inasmuch as by means of those principles naturally known, we judge of those things which we have discovered by reasoning. […] Therefore we must have, (imprinted in) us by nature, not only speculative principles, but also practical principles.[531]

Now, in this text, it is said that those principles come without investigation, not without abstraction. A movement, as passage from potency to act, requires something in act in order to happen. Therefore, the beginning of reasoning as movement cannot be reasoning itself, but must be something immobile, an actual perfection (here, the first

[531] 79, 12, c.: "Ratiocinatio hominis, cum sit quidam motus, ab intellectu progreditur aliquorum, scilicet naturaliter notorum absque investigatione rationis, sicut a quodam principio immobili, et ad intellectum etiam terminatur, inquantum iudicamus per principia per se naturaliter nota, de his quae ratiocinando invenimus […] Oportet igitur naturaliter nobis esse indita, sicut principia speculabilium, ita et principia operabilium."

principles). Granted that the first beginning of a movement cannot be the result of a specifically equal movement, it may well be the result of another kind of passage from potency to act, such as abstraction. The fact that those first principles are principles, in a certain sense, does not mean that they are not a result in a different sense.[532]

Moreover, it is said that these first principles are "naturally known," not that they are innate. "Naturally known" may simply mean known according to nature, according to the natural operation of the human faculties.

At the same time, included or *indita* does not necessarily mean "innate", but it may refer to the presence of those principles in the mind. If knowing is receptive, "naturally included" and "naturally known" mean the same thing; once something is known, it is "in" the mind by means of the species.

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[532] In this sense should be understood *In II De Anima* 11, 224-231: "When a man acquires knowledge […] there are two principles involved: an intrinsic one, which a man uses when he finds things out for himself; and an extrinsic one, as when he learns from others. But in both cases a potency is actualised by something already in act. The light of the agent intellect gives a man immediate actual knowledge of the first principles which we know by nature…" [Homo enim acquirit scientiam, et a principio intrinseco, dum invenit, et a principio extrinseco, dum addiscit. Utrobique autem reducitur de potentia in actum, ab eo quod est actu. Homo enim per lumen intellectus agentis, statim cognoscit actu prima principia naturaliter cognita…] Besides the fact that St. Thomas is saying "statim", and therefore does not necessarily imply a pre-containing of the principles, his point here is that the actuality of the principles *already known* allows the "inveniens" to draw conclusions from them. What is principle in a certain sense (of the conclusions), can be a result in a different sense (of the agent intellect's action on the phantasms). Cf. *In II De Anima* 12, 17-26: "Now, as a subject moves from primary potency into primary actuality when it acquires knowledge through teaching, so too a subject's primary potency to the possession of a sense-faculty is actualised by his birth. But whereas a sense-faculty is natural to every animal,—so that in the act of being generated it acquires a sense-faculty along with its own specific nature—the case is not the same with intellectual knowledge; this is not naturally inborn in man; it has to be acquired through [investigation] and discipline." [Sicut autem *de potentia prima aliquid mutatur in primum actum, dum acquirit scientiam per doctrinam*; ita de prima potentia ad sensum, aliquid mutatur in actum, ut scilicet habeat sensum per generationem. Sensus autem naturaliter inest animali: unde sicut per generationem acquirit propriam naturam, et speciem, ita acquirit sensum. Secus autem est de scientia, quae *non inest homini per naturam* sed acquiritur *per inventionem et disciplinam*.]

This line of interpretation is more consistent with what St. Thomas says four questions later:

> The cognitive soul is in potentiality both to the images which are the principles of sensing, and to those which are the principles of understanding. For this reason Aristotle (De Anima iii, 4) held that the intellect by which the soul understands has no innate species, but is at first in potentiality to all such species.[533]

After denying the presence of species "naturally included", however, St. Thomas does not hesitate to speak about things that are known naturally, precisely the first principles. In showing the inconsistency of Plato's position, that the soul is naturally (from the beginning) endowed with species, St. Thomas says: "Because, if the soul has a natural knowledge of all things, it seems impossible for the soul so far to forget the existence of such knowledge as not to know itself to be possessed thereof: for no man forgets what he knows naturally; that, for instance, the whole is larger than the part, and such like."[534]

St. Thomas, therefore, is affirming the presence of principles "*naturaliter indita*" and then denying the presence of species "*naturaliter indita*." It is not relevant here that St. Thomas speaks initially of principles and then of species because, for Aquinas, the species are the means to understand everything. The use of the same wording, however, should not confuse whomever is attentive to the clear context in which each of the statements occurs. In the first text,[535] St. Thomas is not speaking about the origin of the principles, but about

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[533] 84, 3, c.: "Oportet dicere quod anima cognoscitiva sit in potentia tam ad similitudines quae sunt principia sentiendi, quam ad similitudines quae sunt principia intelligendi. Et propter hoc Aristoteles posuit quod intellectus, quo anima intelligit, non habet aliquas species naturaliter inditas, sed est in principio in potentia ad huiusmodi species omnes."

[534] 84, 3, c.: "Si habet anima naturalem notitiam omnium, non videtur esse possibile quod huius naturalis notitiae tantam oblivionem capiat, quod nesciat se huiusmodi scientiam habere, nullus enim homo obliviscitur ea quae naturaliter cognoscit, sicut quod omne totum sit maius sua parte, et alia huiusmodi."

[535] 79, 12.

the origin of reasoning. Reasoning is a movement of the intellect from something already known to something unknown, and therefore it implies something known as principle. The known which is principle of this movement cannot be the fruit of reasoning, exactly because it is its principle. The known must, then, be the result of the first natural actualization of the intellect, and not of the movement of the intellect as already perfect. That is why St. Thomas says: "naturaliter notorum *absque investigatione rationis*." Here, naturally means "without investigation," because St. Thomas is dealing with the principle of investigation as movement. Naturally also means that it is an actualization according to nature, insofar as it depends, not on the perfection of a particular subject, but on the perfection of nature itself, and here the perfection of the intellectual faculties in order to know reality. Here, principles *naturaliter indita* simply means principles that are present in the mind, not as a result of the movement of the intellect in act, but as a result of the natural first actualization of the intellect.

In the second text, St. Thomas is expressly denying that the knowledge we have of corporeal things comes from species included naturally (= *ex natura* as from the first origin) in the mind. Later in the question, St. Thomas affirms that this knowledge comes from species that are abstracted from the phantasm. That is to say, the species that are the means of human knowledge are not ready-made in the mind, but need to be abstracted from the phantasm of sensitivity. What Aquinas affirms here is that the reason for the lack of species "naturally included" is that the intellect is in potency of species like this: if they were naturally included, the intellect would not be *tabula rasa* or in potency, but in act or at least in habit of possessing science. For St. Thomas, this is clearly not the case. Therefore,

what is denied here ("*species naturaliter indita*") is that the intellect is already in act by nature (that is to say, by being what it is). The reason to deny this is that the intellect is by nature in potency of species like this. What is affirmed or supposed in the previous text is that the first actualization of the intellect is according to nature, and not a result of the reasoning activity of the intellect itself, which is still not in act.

Therefore, it should be clear that, for Aquinas, there is originally nothing in the mind allowing us to say that the mind is in act, or even in the habit of knowing anything. The fact that the actualization of the mind is natural in the first place (first concepts and first judgments depending on those concepts) does not negate the fact that the intellect is in pure potency of all these things, and passive potency, as we have seen.

The same doctrine can be seen in other works of Aquinas. A clear instance is the following text. Here, the explanation of the "*naturaliter*" known is that the light by which those principles are made intelligible is "natural" in human beings. Again, the universal principles known *naturally* come *naturally* from experience:

> In speculative sciences, every consideration is referred back to certain primary things, which man certainly does not need to learn nor find out (otherwise he will need to go on to infinity): man possesses naturally the cognition of these primary things. Of this kind are the indemonstrable principles of demonstration […] and also the first conceptions of the intellect, such as the notion of being, one, and the like […]. Such naturally known things are made known to man through the very light of the agent intellect, which is natural to man, by which light something is made known to us, only insofar as by the agent intellect the phantasms are made intelligible in act. This is in fact the act of the agent intellect, as is said in *III De Anima*. Now, the phantasms come from the senses; from this, it follows that the principle of cognition

> of the aforementioned principles is in the senses and the memory, as the Philosopher demonstrates towards the end of *Posteriorum*.[536] (my trans.)

In the text of *In III De Anima* 4, 26-35, St. Thomas is denying that the agent intellect be the *habitus* of the first principles insofar as this would imply that the soul already understands in act the terms of these principles, and so that those terms are not acquired by the action of the agent intellect. It is evident that for Aquinas there is nothing naturally precontained in the soul, regarding the content of understanding:

> This last phrase has led some to suppose that the agent intellect is one with the 'intellect' which is a habitual apprehension of first principles. But it is not so; for the latter 'intellect' presupposes [some things already understood in act, namely the terms of those principles], in understanding which we apprehend the truth of first principles. So the view in question would imply that the agent intellect was not, as Aristotle here maintains, the primary source, for us, of the actual intelligibility of anything.[537]

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[536] *In Boet. De Trin*. 6, 4, c.: "Omnis consideratio scientiarum speculativarum reducitur in aliqua prima, quae quidem homo non habet necesse addiscere aut invenire, ne oporteat in infinitum procedere, sed eorum notitiam naturaliter habet. Et huiusmodi sunt principia demonstrationum indemonstrabilia […] et etiam primae conceptiones intellectus, ut entis et unius et huiusmodi […] Huiusmodi autem *naturaliter* cognita homini manifestantur ex ipso lumine intellectus agentis, quod est homini *naturale*, quo quidem lumine nihil manifestatur nobis, nisi in quantum per ipsum phantasmata fiunt intelligibilia in actu. Hic enim est actus intellectus agentis, ut dicitur in *III De Anima*. Phantasmata autem a sensu accipiuntur; unde principium cognitionis praedictorum principiorum est ex sensu et memoria, ut patet per philosophum in fine *Posteriorum*." The same reference to the *Posteriora* is found in another clear text *De Ver* 10, 6, sc 2: "At first, all our cognition consists in the knowledge of first undeducible principles. But the cognition of these arises in us from sense, as is clear from the Posterior Analytics. Therefore, all our knowledge arises from sense." [Omnis nostra cognitio *originaliter* consistit in notitia primorum principiorum indemonstrabilium. Horum autem cognitio in nobis a sensu *oritur*, ut patet in fine *Poster*. Ergo scientia nostra a sensu oritur.] What is original as content in human understanding is not precontained but acquired from experience.

[537] *In III De Anima* 4, 26-35: "Huius autem verbi occasione, quidam posuerunt intellectum agentem idem esse cum intellectu qui est habitus principiorum. Quod esse non potest: quia intellectus, qui est habitus principiorum, praesupponit aliqua iam intellecta in actu: scilicet terminos principiorum, per quorum intelligentiam cognoscimus principia: et sic sequeretur, quod intellectus agens non faceret omnia intelligibilia in actu, ut hic philosophus dicit." The text continues explaining in what sense Aristotle says that the agent intellect is a "habitus": "Therefore I hold that the term ['habit'] is used here in the sense in which Aristotle often calls any form or nature a ['habit'], to

That the first principles are also known from experience and, therefore, not to be confounded with the agent intellect, is explicit in the following text. From texts like this it is clear also that the first principles are not naturally present in the intellect, in the sense of previous to the agent intellect's action on the phantasms:

> Indeed, some men thought that the agent intellect does not differ from our habitus of indemonstrable principles. But this cannot be the case, because we certainly know indemonstrable principles by abstracting them from singulars, as the Philosopher teaches in the Posterior Analytics.[538]

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distinguish it from a privation or a potency. In this case the agent intellect is called a [habit] to distinguish it from the intellect in potency." [Dicendum est ergo, quod habitus, sic accipitur secundum quod philosophus frequenter consuevit nominare omnem formam et naturam habitum, prout habitus distinguitur contra privationem et potentiam, ut sic per hoc quod nominat eum habitum distinguat eum ab intellectu possibili, qui est potentia.]

[538] *Q.D. De Anima,* a.5, c.: "Quidam vero crediderunt intellectum agentem non esse aliud quam habitum principiorum indemonstrabilium in nobis. Sed hoc esse non potest, quia etiam ipsa principia indemonstrabilia cognoscimus abstrahendo a singularibus, ut docet philosophus in *I Poster*." Among the "Thomistic negations regarding the agent intellect", Sellés includes that it is not receptive of habits (innate, acquired or infused) and it is not to be confounded with the habit of the first principles (cf. Sellés, *EIA*, 272). In a footnote, Fabro says the following: "'Praeexistunt enim in ipsa (natura humana) *naturaliter* principia demonstrationum per se nota, quae sunt *semina* quaedam sapientiae, et principia quaedam iuris naturalis quae sunt semina quaedam virtutum moralium' [For self-evident principles of demonstrations, which are seeds of the contemplation of wisdom, naturally preexist in (that nature), as do principles of natural law, which are seeds of the moral virtues] (*De Veritate*, q. XIV, a. 2; cfr. q. XI, a. 1 ad 5um; q. XVIII, a. 6). Elsewhere it is explicitly said that the first principles are '*innati* quodammodo' [innate, in a sense (my trans.)]. Cfr. *In II Sent*., Dist. 24, q. II, a. 3; *In IV Sent.,* Dist. 49, q. I, a. 3, Sol. III; *De Veritate*, q. X, a. 6 ad 6um. This terminology, which was in common with the Agostinians (v. MATTHAEUS AB AQUASPARTA, *QQ. De Fide et cognition*, Ad Aquas Claras, 1903, q. 1, p. 53) disappears in the Thomistic works of maturity, where the origin of the first principles is absolutely entrusted to the [Greek] *epagogué*, which takes them from experience, not only regarding the content of the isolated terms but also regarding their connection. On this question cfr. C. Fabro, [English in the original] *Knowledge and Perception in the aristotelic-thomistic Psychology*, in: 'The new Sholasticism' XII (1938), pp. 337-365" (Fabro, *NMP*, 277. A new edition of the cited article is in our *Bibliography*). Regardless of the terminology, I think it is clear that the doctrine of Aquinas on the origin of the first principles has not changed.

1.6. The Text of 84, 6: *materia causae*

The fact that Aquinas mentions sensibility as not the total and perfect cause of intellectual knowing, but rather as the matter of the (total) cause ("*materia causae*"), may seem to imply that the form of the cause (the universal content) is provided by the (agent) intellect. In this way, Aquinas would be suggesting an Epistemology in line with Kant's, in which the senses provide the matter and intelligence the form. Is this actually what the text suggests? Which other texts could shed light on a correct interpretation?

Let us take a closer look at 84, 6. The question is whether or not the soul acquires its intellectual knowledge from the sensible things, and the answer is positive, but with a distinction. Throughout the entire article it seems clear that knowing is receptive and not active, since the issue of the source of knowing is referred to the principle of a proportionate cause, *by which* knowledge is produced in the faculty. In other words, the agent *object* of intellectual knowing must be different from the one of sensibility, because there must be a proportion between effect (here, the different knowing) and agent.[539] In the third objection, in fact, St. Thomas argues: "An effect does not surpass the power of its cause. But intellectual knowledge extends beyond sensible things: for we understand some

[539] A similar approach to the question, that is, the principle of a proportionate cause, may be seen in *De Spirit. Creat*., a.10, ad 17: "A species which is in the imagination is of the same genus as a species which is in a sense, because both are individual and material. But a species which is in an intellect belongs to another genus, because it is universal. And consequently an imagined species cannot imprint an intelligible species as a sensitive species imprints an imagined species; and for this reason an active intellectual power is necessary, whereas an active sense power is not." [… species quae est in imaginatione, est eiusdem generis cum specie quae est in sensu, quia utraque est individualis et materialis; sed species quae est in intellectu, est alterius generis, quia est universalis. *Et ideo* species imaginaria *non potest imprimere* speciem intelligibilem, sicut species sensibilis imprimit speciem imaginariam; *propter quod necessaria est virtus intellectiva activa*, non autem virtus sensitiva activa.]

things which cannot be perceived by the senses. Therefore intellectual knowledge is not derived from sensible things."[540] In the objection, then, the reason that our intellectual knowledge does not come from sensible things is because they are not, as sensible, proportionate cause for our knowledge of intellectual things. Sense knowledge here is clearly perception, and intellectual knowledge is allegedly too. As Fabro notes,[541] St. Thomas in responding does not reject the principles of the objection: "Sensitive knowledge is not the entire cause of intellectual knowledge. And therefore it is not strange that intellectual knowledge should extend further than sensitive knowledge."[542] That is, it is true that the effect does not go beyond the cause: there must be proportion. However, because what is perceived by the senses is not the total cause of intellectual knowing, but is the cause only in a certain sense (materially), we can still say that intellectual knowing comes from sensible things, even if it is not reduced to the content of sensible cognition.

The point is, then, that there must be a proportionate cause that produces intellectual knowledge in the possible intellect (i.e., the intelligible in act), as the sensible in act is proportionate cause of sensible knowledge. The corpus is better understood in this sense: "And therefore in order to cause the intellectual operation according to Aristotle, the impression caused by the sensible does not suffice, but something more noble is required,

[540] 84, 6, ob. 3: "Effectus non se extendit ultra virtutem suae causae. Sed intellectualis cognitio se extendit ultra sensibilia; intelligimus enim quaedam quae sensu percipi non possunt. Intellectualis ergo cognitio non derivatur a rebus sensibilibus."

[541] Cf. LS, 116, footnote.

[542] 84, 6 ad 3: "Ad tertium dicendum quod sensitiva cognitio non est tota causa intellectualis cognitionis. Et ideo non est mirum si intellectualis cognitio ultra sensitivam se extendit."

for 'the agent is more noble than the patient,' as he says."[543] Here *agens* does not refer to the agent intellect directly, but to the intelligible in act produced by the agent intellect, as the following comparison with the Platonic idea and the reference to "*intelligibilia in actu*" suggest:

> Not, indeed, in the sense that the intellectual operation is effected in us by the mere impression of some superior beings, as Plato held; but that the higher and more noble agent which he calls the active intellect, of which we have spoken above,[544] causes the phantasms received from the senses to be actually intelligible, by a process of abstraction.[545]

In other words, intellectual knowledge cannot be caused by the mere impression of sensible things (for lack of proportionate cause), nor is it caused by the impression of a Platonic idea (for the source of knowledge must be in the sensible things, which are the true reality), but by the impression of the *intelligible in act*, produced from the phantasm by the agent intellect and impressed in the possible intellect.

> According to this opinion, then, on the part of the phantasms, intellectual knowledge is caused by the senses. But since the phantasms cannot of themselves affect the passive intellect, and require to be made actually intelligible by the active

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[543] 84, 6, c.: "Et ideo ad causandam intellectualem operationem, secundum Aristotelem, non sufficit sola impressio sensibilium corporum, sed requiritur aliquid nobilius, quia agens est honorabilius patiente, ut ipse dicit."

[544] The Ottawa edition refers to 79, 3 and 4.

[545] 84, 6, c.: "Non tamen ita quod intellectualis operatio causetur in nobis ex sola impressione aliquarum rerum superiorum, ut Plato posuit, sed illud superius et nobilius agens quod vocat intellectum agentem, de quo iam supra diximus, facit phantasmata a sensibus accepta intelligibilia in actu, per modum abstractionis cuiusdam." Cf. *In III De Anima* 4, 76-77, where St. Thomas interprets the Aristotelian phrase: "the agent is more noble than the patient" (my trans.) [honorabilius est agens paciente] in the *De Anima*'s text on the agent intellect as referred to the agent intellect itself. I do not think that this challenges my interpretation of the *Summa*, for the reasons exposed above, and for what we will say about the agent intellect as *actus intelligibilium*, i.e., in what sense the agent intellect could be said to be that which actualizes "formally" the object of understanding.

> intellect, it cannot be said that sensible knowledge is the total and perfect cause of intellectual knowledge, but rather that it is in a way the [matter of the] cause.[546]

Quodammodo materia causae, therefore, means that the phantasm is the "matter" out of which the agent intellect produces the intelligible in act by means of its illumination, and that same intelligible in act will be the proportionate cause of intellectual knowing.

Is this not precisely what leads some readers of Aquinas to reduce sensible knowing to providing the matter for the completing activity of intelligence? It is important to remember that in question 84, Aquinas is trying to explain how intelligence works (in this life), not directly what it knows, which is already presupposed. In other words, the problem is not whether we understand corporeal things, but how. The first article tells us by which faculty we understand (precisely making the important distinction between *res intellecta* and *modus rei intellectae*), whereas the following articles tell us by which agent object. That is why, after denying that knowledge of corporeal things is verified by means of intelligible "ready-made" intermediaries (the intellect's own essence, innate species, infused species, or the essence of God), Aquinas goes to the other "extreme", the sensible things, in order to show in what sense something that is not actually intelligible can be the source of the intellectual operation; in this way, Aquinas finally arrives at the abstracted species as agent object. Therefore, in this context, that sensible knowing is in a certain sense the matter of intellectual knowing should be understood of the operation (how), not of the content (what), i.e., of intelligibility as a mode of being, not of what is understood. St. Thomas is not

[546] 84, 6, c.: "Secundum hoc ergo, ex parte phantasmatum intellectualis operatio a sensu causatur. Sed quia phantasmata non sufficiunt immutare intellectum possibilem, sed oportet quod fiant intelligibilia actu per intellectum agentem; non potest dici quod sensibilis cognitio sit totalis et perfecta causa intellectualis cognitionis, sed magis quodammodo est materia causae."

saying that the phantasm is the matter of *what is understood*, but that the *mode of being* of the phantasm is not proportionate to be the agent object of intellectual knowing, and therefore, in its particularity, the phantasm works only as a "matter" from which the agent intellect produces the agent object, which is the intelligible in act. In other words, he is not saying that sensible things are a matter that obtains intelligibility as content when the agent intellect illuminates them; he is saying that the phantasm is *like a* matter that obtains intelligibility as a mode of being when it is illuminated by the agent intellect. As we have seen, for Aquinas, sensible things are what is understood, insofar as the universal nature subsisting in the corporeal things is the object of understanding.

The agent object is necessarily an intelligible in act. That is why the sensible things cannot be the agent object of intellectual knowing. But because our agent object does come from sensible things, they can be said to be in a certain sense the source of our intellectual knowing. The agent intellect produces the intelligible in act from the phantasm, and for this reason, the phantasm can be considered a certain "matter" of the agent object, in the sense of "that out of which" the intelligible in act comes in some way.

In what way? Aquinas mentions it: "*per modum abstractionis cuiusdam*." The way the phantasm is made intelligible in act by the agent intellect is "by a certain abstraction," that is, not by preserving the phantasm's particularity, nor by borrowing a certain content, but by the intellect's "taking from" the phantasm. Aquinas has previously explained

abstraction as a "separation" of the universal object from its individual conditions in the matter.[547]

The following seems to be the passage that would mislead Aquinas' readers: "causes *the phantasms* received from the senses to be actually intelligible, by a process of abstraction."[548] It does seem that *what* is understood is the phantasm itself, modified in

[547] Cf. 79, 3, c.: "We must therefore assign on the part of the intellect some power to make things actually intelligible, by abstraction of the species from material conditions." [Oportebat igitur ponere aliquam virtutem ex parte intellectus, quae faceret intelligibilia in actu, per abstractionem specierum a conditionibus materialibus.]; 79, 4, c.: "… we perceive that we abstract universal forms from their particular conditions, which is to make them actually intelligible." [… percipimus nos abstrahere formas universales a conditionibus particularibus, quod est facere actu intelligibilia]; and afterwards in 85, 1 ad 3: "This is done by the power of the active intellect which by turning towards the phantasm produces in the passive intellect a certain likeness which represents, as to its specific conditions only, the thing reflected in the phantasm. It is thus that the intelligible species is said to be abstracted from the phantasm…" [Sed virtute intellectus agentis resultat quaedam similitudo in intellectu possibili ex conversione intellectus agentis supra phantasmata, quae quidem est repraesentativa eorum quorum sunt phantasmata, solum quantum ad naturam speciei. Et per hunc modum dicitur abstrahi species intelligibilis a phantasmatibus…] That St. Thomas considers abstraction more a "consideration" than a "separation" (cf. 85, 1 ad 1) does not take away the fact that he considers the species "taken from" the phantasm (cf. *In I De Anima* 2, 261: "plane-surfaces […] which can be considered by the mind apart from the matter" [superficies, quae ratione possunt *separari a* naturali materia]). The context should be regarded in each case: when abstraction refers more to the production of the intelligible in act as agent object, it means something more like "separation", because the intelligible species is really separate from the phantasm, as two different agent objects (cf. *De Spirit. Creat.*, a.10, c.: "For one particular man, such as Socrates or Plato, makes things intelligible in act when he pleases, that is, by apprehending a universal form from particulars, when he separates that which is common to all individual men from those things which are peculiar to each." [Unus enim homo particularis, ut Socrates vel Plato, facit cum vult intelligibilia in actu, apprehendendo scilicet universale a particularibus, dum secernit id quod est commune omnibus individuis hominum, ab his quae sunt propria singulis.]); but when it regards the universal content of the species, as distinct from the sensible, St. Thomas prefers to speak about "consideration", because the content, though absolutely speaking distinct (and therefore knowable without the other), is not really separate from the particular (cf. *In III De Anima* 6, 274-276: "Therefore the intellect abstracts things present in the sense-objects, not understanding them to be separate, but understanding them in separation and distinctly." [my trans.] [Ea ergo quae sunt in sensibilibus abstrahit intellectus, non quidem intelligens ea esse separata, sed *separatim* et seorsum ea intelligens.]) This is clearly related to the distinction between abstraction as act of the agent intellect and as act of the possible intellect (cf. Cromp, 16ff.; *Chapter 1*, section 4; *Chapter 4*, section 2).

[548] 84, 6, c.: "… facit phantasmata a sensibus accepta intelligibilia in actu per modum abstractionis cuiusdam."

some way by the agent intellect, and so *perhaps* provided with intelligibility as content. But abstraction, which is explicitly the way in which the phantasm is made intelligible in act, does not support that assumption. We should rather say that the phantasm is *what* is made intelligible in act, insofar as it is the subject matter of the action of the agent intellect.

There is another indication in the text that may support a reading in line with the rest of the proposed interpretation. Intellectual knowledge in the last paragraph is equated with the *immutatio* of the possible intellect by the agent object, and not with the agent intellect's activity, which is the condition of the *immutatio*. The two potencies and their respective operations are not confused, as we have seen, and knowing is not portrayed as an activity on sensibility but as a receptivity conditioned by such activity (agent intellect as metaphysical a priori of intellectual knowing as receptive of objective content). We have already seen that this activity implies that the content is already present in the particular, and therefore refers to the mode of being of the content.

For the reasons explained, it does not seem that a notion of experience that provides only the raw material for the informative activity of intelligence can be grounded on this text. I would add that the "*quodammodo"* should be taken more seriously, and therefore less as a precise reference to a "raw material." It must be admitted that this particular text is not as clear as others; in any case, however, the meaning of more obscure statements should be clarified by paying attention to the rest of the treatise, since it is not plausible that St. Thomas denies here what he affirms elsewhere. The three previous chapters are intended to provide that context.

In other passages St. Thomas refers to this "material" role of sensibility in other ways.

In 77, 7, c., as we have seen previously, Aquinas says that if we consider the soul insofar as it is receptive, the lower potencies act as principles of the higher ones. Thus, the senses provide as it were the subject matter for the work of the intellect: "But considered as receptive principles, the more [imperfect] powers are principles with regard to the others; thus the soul, according as it has the sensitive power, is considered as the subject, and as [a certain] material with regard to the intelligence."[549] It is important to note that the senses are considered as a certain (again *quoddam*) matter for the intellect, but insofar as the intellect is considered a certain capacity of reception, and not as an active principle whatsoever. The first part of the article, instead, deals with the intellect as a certain active principle of the lower potencies with regards to their being ("*sicut imperfectum a perfecto*").[550] However, this activity is not referred to the activity of the agent intellect. In the second part of the article St. Thomas is dealing with the faculties in their operation,[551] and in that exact context the intellect is considered as a receptive – knowing faculty, whose subject matter is provided by the senses. This, of course, does not take away the necessity of an agent intellect acting on the phantasm of sensitivity, but it does show how the fact that St. Thomas considers the product of sensitivity *a certain* matter of the intellectual

[549] 77, 7, c.: "Sed secundum viam susceptivi principii, e converso potentiae imperfectiores inveniuntur principia respectu aliarum, sicut anima, secundum quod habet potentiam sensitivam, consideratur sicut subiectum et materiale quoddam respectu intellectus."

[550] We set aside the other way in which the higher potencies are principles of the lower: by finality.

[551] As in question 84, the material role of the senses is in the context of the operation.

operation, does not mean that he considers the intellectual operation as an activity. As in the interpretation of the phantasm as object, the important point is to understand the role of the senses in human knowing as providing the real in its "real" mode of being, in its particularity, and therefore putting the soul in contact with its object. Insofar as the senses provide what is to be known intellectually, they may be said to provide the "object" of human understanding; that is, we understand particular things. But, insofar as the proper object of human understanding is the *quidditas* of the corporeal things, which is not actually intelligible in the phantasm, the senses are said to provide the "material" of human understanding, that is to say, not the "form" that is understood, but the "material from which" that form will come, supposed the action of the agent intellect. The translation "subject matter" seems to convey accurately what Aquinas means by "*materiale quoddam*"[552] and "*quodammodo materia causae*",[553] insofar as the matter here contains what is to be understood.

A related understanding of the role of the senses with regards to the intellectual operation can be taken from 89, 5, c.: "But as the intellectual act resides chiefly and formally in the intellect itself, whilst it resides materially and dispositively in the inferior powers, the same distinction is to be applied to habit."[554] The act of the intellect is mainly and formally in the intellect itself insofar as the intellect is the place of the intelligible

[552] 77, 7.

[553] 84, 6.

[554] 89, 5, c.: "Sed sicut actus intellectus principaliter quidem et formaliter est in ipso intellectu, materialiter autem et dispositive in inferioribus viribus, idem etiam dicendum est de habitu."

species ("*locus specierum*"[555]); it is materially and "in a way that creates the conditions" ("*dispositive*") in the inferior faculties, insofar as the intellect turns to their phantasms in order to see (*speculari*) its own intelligible objects (as existing in the concrete)[556] St. Thomas is speaking directly of the act of the intellect after the abstraction has happened, and therefore the "materiality" of the sensible object acquires here a different sense. Abstraction and conversion are distinct for St. Thomas. The sensible object is not here a "matter from which" the object will be taken, or a "subject matter" on which the agent intellect will realize its operation; it is rather like a "ground" or "support" for the intellectual activity, that which keeps the intelligible species bound to reality. The sensible object is what allows the intellect to see the universal nature as it is, as (existing) in the concrete. The act of intelligence should be truly understood as an "*intus – legere*," a *reading* the universal nature *in* the concrete reality. This is, in my view, what Aquinas means by *conversio ad phantasmata*. The abstraction, instead, is still not a "reading into" because it is the "production" of what is to be read (the image) "out of" the phantasm. And the point of this dissertation is to show that what the agent intellect produces is not what is to be read in its content, but in its intelligible mode of being: the agent intellect produces the species, the image of the nature that exists in the concrete. Just as the light does not paint the different

[555] Cf. *In III De Anima* 1, 226-236: "We can see the point of the old saying that the soul is the 'place' of forms,—meaning that it receives these into itself […] It follows that the soul as a whole is not the 'place' of forms, but only that part of it which lacks a bodily organ, i.e. the intellect; and even this part does not, as such, possess them actually, but potentially only." [Iam potest verificari dictum illorum, qui dixerunt, quod anima est locus specierum: quod per similitudinem dicitur, eo quod est specierum receptiva (…) Et ideo non dicendum est, quod tota anima sit locus specierum, sed solum pars intellectiva, quae organum non habet. Nec ita est locus specierum, quod habeat actu species, sed potentia tantum.]

[556] Cf. 84, 7, c.: "… [I]n order to perceive the universal nature existing in the individual." [… ut speculetur naturam universalem in particulari existentem.]

colours but makes them all visible, the agent intellect makes visible the different natures of particular things. Finally, it is important to note that the material role of the senses, in this text, is not related to an activity of in-formation by the intelligence, but to the necessity of a connexion with the real through the *conversio ad phantasmata* of the intellect in act. The phantasm is not the object of the intellect, because it is sensible; however, *the way* in which the intellect contemplates its intelligible object is by converting to the phantasm (the sensible object). And, although it would be impossible to maintain that the intellect beholds two objects, it is not impossible to maintain that, while only one of them actualizes it formally, the other qualifies the operation. In the end, the intellect is the cause of the cognitive power of the senses, and they are for it, as Aquinas says. Their metaphysical interconnection may help in understanding the possibility of this cooperation in the operative realm.

The distinction between the respective formal objects of the senses and intelligence, and the interconnection between them, is also mentioned in 78, 4 ad 4: "Although the operation of the intellect has its origin in the senses:[557] yet, in the thing apprehended through the senses, the intellect knows many things which the senses cannot perceive. In like manner does the estimative power, though in a less perfect manner."[558] Although there is no explicit mention of materiality, the idea of the object of the senses as a "matter from which" ("*oriatur a sensu*") and the idea of the intellect knowing its object *in* the object of

[557] The material role of the senses is again related to the intellectual operation.

[558] 78, 4 ad 4: "Licet intellectus operatio oriatur a sensu, tamen in re apprehensa per sensum intellectus multa cognoscit quae sensus percipere non potest. Et similiter aestimativa, licet inferiori modo." Cf. 84, 6, ob. 3 and ad 3.

the senses ("*in re apprehensa per sensum*") are present. At the same time, the comparison between the estimative faculty and the intellect reassures us that St. Thomas is talking about both as "perceptive" (receptive) faculties. The estimative faculty, indeed, is able to perceive things that the external senses do not (the sensible *per accidens*), and in this it is similar to the intellect, which "perceives" the *quidditas* of the corporeal thing.

Aquinas' "*materia causae*" in 84, 6 does not seem to support a Kantian reading of his doctrine. St. Thomas is saying that the senses provide the object as subject matter, they present the real in its real mode of being, they provide the necessary contact with the real for the intellectual operation to happen. But, for that operation to happen, something else is required. The real in its real mode of being cannot actualize the intelligence: only an intelligible in act can do that. The agent intellect illuminates the phantasm and makes its *quidditas* visible to the eye of intelligence. More powerful than the eye of the senses is the eye of the intelligence, but intelligence still needs a light to see its proper object (and this is the agent intellect) as well as needing the real object itself (and this is the role of the senses). It is always *in* the phantasm that the eye of intelligence can see its proportionate object, which is the universal *quidditas* of this phantasm as objective representation of the corporeal thing. The phantasm, therefore, is the matter of the cause insofar as the efficient cause (the agent intellect) produces the agent object (the intelligible species) *from the phantasm*, making the latter (which stands for the particular real thing) intelligible in act by means of abstraction.[559]

[559] Therese Cory, approaching instead the admission of a formal a priori in intellectual knowing, interprets this text differently than I do. Notice how she uses almost the same words I use

1.7. The Agent Intellect as "*actus intelligibilium*"

The next task is to study the texts in Aquinas which seem to speak more directly about the agent intellect as a certain form of the object of intelligence.

According to St. Thomas, we cannot say that there are intelligible species ready-made in the mind. However, we cannot deny that the agent intellect is ready-made in the subject (i.e. something belonging to the soul). Now, Aquinas says that the agent intellect is the "act of the intelligible" objects in the mind. Might this mean that the agent intellect is the form (act, perfection) of everything we understand, and therefore *what* is understood in every act of intelligence? Might this be a clear Thomistic indication of the agent intellect as a formal a priori of human understanding?

Let us begin with an explicit occurrence of "*actus intelligibilium*":

> But as in this life our intellect has material and sensible things for its proper natural object, as stated above, it understands itself according as it is made actual by the species abstracted from sensible things, through the light of the active intellect, which […] actuates the intelligible things themselves, [and] also, by their

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to speak of a metaphysical a priori, but in a different sense: "[O]ne might argue that APM_3 ['Active Principle Model 3', her proposal for an interpretation of the action of the agent intellect in Aquinas] is not empiricist enough, because the intellectual light adds something to the intellect that was not 'first in the senses,' that is, the form of intelligibility. Indeed, Aquinas agrees that 'the senses are not the total cause of intellectual cognition.' Nevertheless, this does not seem to be of major concern, since in APM_3 the intellectual light does not add any content, but only a new mode of existing, that of intelligible being." And in note she clarifies: "At least, it does not add new content relevant for understanding the essence of the extramental object. As I have argued, Aquinas holds that all actually intelligible being is self-intelligible, so because the agent intellect grants actually intelligible being to the possible intellect through the intelligible species, there is a sense in which the very intelligibility of the intelligible species is a kind of content that allows the intellect to cognize itself when it is cognizing anything else (*Aquinas on Human Self-Knowledge*, ch. 6)" (Cory, *Rethinking*, 639, my underline). Cf. my previous remarks on Cory in *Chapter 1*. For a rather strange interpretation of the passage, see Berger, 38, 43. He refers the *materia causae* to the materiality of the external senses even with regard to the internal senses.

> instrumentality, actuates the passive intellect. Therefore the intellect knows itself not by its essence, but by its act.[560]

In what sense is the agent intellect the act of the intelligible (objects)? First, let us examine what St. Thomas is talking about, then what those intelligibles are, and finally the meaning here of "act."

1) St. Thomas is saying that the intellect cannot become an object of knowledge unless it is *subjectively* (as a real being) in act. This is because, even if it is a being in the realm of the intelligible, it is in that realm the least, insofar as it is only in potency, like the *materia prima* in the realm of corporeal things. Now, what makes the possible intellect *subjectively* in act is the species as subjective modification.

2) Therefore, when St. Thomas says that the agent intellect is the act of the intelligible (objects) he is directly referring to this aspect of the intelligible species (its reality as *forma quo*), not to the intentional presence of the object. In other words, the agent intellect is "act of the intelligible" in its intelligible mode of being, not in its content.

3) What does it mean that the agent intellect is the act of the species and, through it, of the possible intellect? Act is the principle by which something is perfect in some sense, belonging intrinsically to the thing itself. The agent cause is not "act of the thing" in this sense. But, if we take as "act of the thing" that which "perfects" the thing itself by

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[560] 87, 1, c.: "Sed quia connaturale est intellectui nostro, secundum statum praesentis vitae, quod ad materialia et sensibilia respiciat, sicut supra dictum est; consequens est ut sic seipsum intelligat intellectus noster, secundum quod fit actu per species a sensibilibus abstractas per lumen intellectus agentis, quod est actus ipsorum intelligibilium, et eis mediantibus [Ottawa edition adds: "intelligit"] intellectus possibilis. Non ergo per essentiam suam, sed per actum suum se cognoscit intellectus noster."

participating some perfection, then it certainly includes the agent cause but we would, then, be using the word "actus" in an analogical and broader sense. Is this what Aquinas is doing? Let us see whether or not this suggestion can be grounded in the text.

If the correction of the Leonine edition is right, the agent intellect would be both the act of the species and the act of the possible intellect *through the species*.[561] That means the species are that which directly actualize the possible intellect. Now, if we take "species" here as agent object (as *species impressa*), St. Thomas would be suggesting that the species are act of the possible intellect insofar as they are its agent object. This would also be in line

[561] Cf. *CG II*, 76, par. 15: "Now, man is the most perfect of all lower movers, and his proper and natural operation is understanding, which is not accomplished without a certain passivity, in that the intellect is passive to the intelligible; nor again, without action, in that the intellect makes things that are potentially intelligible to be actually so. Therefore, the proper principles of both these operations must be in man's nature, nor must either of them have being in separation from his soul. And these principles are the agent and the possible intellects." [Homo autem est perfectissimus inter omnia inferiora moventia. Eius autem propria et naturalis operatio est intelligere: quae non completur sine passione quadam, inquantum *intellectus patitur ab intelligibili*; et etiam sine actione, inquantum *intellectus facit intelligibilia in potentia esse intelligibilia in actu*. Oportet igitur in natura hominis esse utriusque proprium principium scilicet intellectum agentem et possibilem; et neutrum secundum esse ab anima hominis separatum esse.] A few paragraphs later Aquinas clarifies that the forms actualizing the possible intellect are the intelligible species themselves, not the agent intellect. This is the meaning of the Aristotelian comparison of the agent intellect to art, for example in *CG II*, 76, par. 18: "For the agent intellect stands in the same relation to the intelligible species received into the possible intellect as art to the artificial forms which it produces in matter, as the example used by Aristotle in *De anima III* […] makes clear." [Comparatur enim intellectus agens ad species intelligibiles receptas in intellectu possibili, sicut ars ad formas artificiales quae per artem ponuntur in materia: ut patet ex exemplo Aristotelis in *III De Anima*.] Also for Sellés (cf. *EIA*, 254, 272) the agent intellect has a function of act on the intelligible species, not directly on the possibile intellect. And he quotes Aquinas (translation follows): "Et si quis recte consideret, intellectus agens, secundum ea quae Philosophus de ipso tradit non est activum respectu intellectus possibilis directe, sed magis respectu phantasmatum, quae facit intelligibilia actu, per quae intellectus possibilis reducitur in actum quando aspectus eius inclinatur ad inferiora ex unione corporis." [And if one considers rightly, he will see that, according to the Philosopher's own treatment of the matter, the agent intellect is not active directly with respect to the possible intellect, but rather with respect to phantasms which the agent intellect makes actually intelligible. And it is by the phantasms thus actualized that the possible intellect is actualized when, as a result of its union with the body, its vision is turned to inferior things.] (*Q.D. De Anima*, a. 18, ad 11, in Sellés, *EIA*, 254)

with what Aquinas has just said: "[*intellectus*] *fit actu per species a sensibilibus abstractas per lumen intellectus agentis.*" The preposition "*per*" is normally used for the agent cause: here the species is agent as agent object (*intellectus* "*fit actu per*") and the agent intellect is agent as the one abstracting (= *faciens intelligibilia*) the species from the senses ("*abstractas per*"). I suggest that there is a clear connection between the "*fit actu per*" and "*eis mediantibus intellectus possibilis*," and between "*abstractas per*" and "*actus ipsorum intelligibilium*." In both cases, the agent intellect is cause of something (*species impressa*) that in turn is cause of the act of the intellect. The use of the word "actus" has to do with the fact that St. Thomas is looking for a subjective actuality in the intellect (its own *actus*) that would allow it to be object of knowing; this subjective intelligibility, or intelligibility as mode of being *in the possible intellect*, is the intelligibility of the species because, of itself, the intellect is in potency (intelligible species as *actus intellectus*); this intelligible mode of being of the species is in turn the perfection of the agent intellect since, of itself, the species (= nature) in its real mode of being is particular (agent intellect as "*actus ipsorum intelligibilium*"). In both cases, however, one is *actus* of the other insofar as agent, and not as intrinsically perfecting the other: but because the perfection received does not belong originally to the recipient, it makes sense to call the cause "act" of it, to underline the potentiality of the recipient. This latter is exactly the point of the article: because the essence of the soul is in potency, it cannot be known by itself, but by its operation.

If the previous reflections seem complicated, it should be granted that it is difficult to call the agent intellect "act of the intelligible" in any other sense. That the agent intellect is not the cause of the intelligible content has already been discussed (insofar as the

intelligible content is not something that needs to be made, but it is ready-made in the thing itself as its nature). For this reason, the agent intellect cannot be the act of the intelligible as its formal content. That the agent intellect cannot be confounded with the intelligible mode of being of each species, may be concluded from the fact that an agent cause is not identified with its effect; if the agent intellect is responsible for the mode of being of the object specifically as agent of this mode of being, then agent intellect and mode of being of the object are not the same thing. For this reason, the agent intellect cannot be act of the intelligible as its intelligible mode of being. This can be taken from the following two texts as well.

In 79, 4 ad 3, the role of agent object is denied the agent intellect: the latter is not the (agent) object, but the faculty making that object in act. Both sense and intelligence are shown to be actualized by their respective objects in act:

> If the relation of the active intellect to the passive were that of the active object to a power, as, for instance, of the visible in act to the sight; it would follow that we could understand all things instantly, since the active intellect is that which makes all things (in act). But now the active intellect is not an object, rather is it that whereby the objects are made to be in act…[562]

The role of the object as agent (here *movens*) and its distinction from the agent intellect are present again in 79, 7, c.: "Nevertheless there is a distinction between the power of the active intellect and of the passive intellect: because as regards the same

[562] 79, 4 ad 3: "Dicendum quod, si intellectus agens compararetur ad intellectum possibilem ut obiectum agens ad potentiam, sicut visibile in actu ad visum; sequeretur quod statim omnia intelligeremus, cum intellectus agens sit quo est omnia facere. Nunc autem non se habet ut obiectum, sed ut faciens obiecta in actu…"

object, the active power which makes the object to be in act must be distinct from the passive power, which is moved by the object existing in act."[563]

Clearly, the agent intellect is not act of the intelligible as intrinsic perfection of the intelligible in any sense: neither as its content, nor as its mode of being.

The interpretation being proposed is the following. The principle by which (the nature of) the real thing is intelligible in act is the agent intellect. Now, this does not mean that the agent intellect communicates intelligibility as universal content, but that it is the principle of intelligibility as a mode of being. In other words, the agent intellect is not an objective act of the material of sensibility, but an agent principle of the intelligibility of the abstracted species. That is why, in 87, 1, c., that which actualizes the possible intellect directly, as a form of it, is the (already) intelligible species, not the agent intellect. The agent intellect as act is not perfective of the possible intellect in itself, but of the abstracted species and, then, not insofar as it gives them objective intelligibility, but insofar as it gives them intelligibility as a mode of being.

The expression "*actus intelligibilium*" recurs in the response to *Objection Two*. St. Thomas is here explaining why the human intellect is not in act in the realm of the intelligible things: "… not so the human mind, which is either altogether in potentiality to intelligible things—as is the passive intellect—or is the act of intelligible things abstracted

[563] 79, 7, c.: "Diversificatur tamen potentia intellectus agentis, et intellectus possibilis, quia respectu eiusdem obiecti, aliud principium oportet esse potentiam activam, quae facit obiectum esse in actu; et aliud potentiam passivam, quae movetur ab obiecto in actu existente."

from the phantasms—as is the active intellect."[564] Therefore, the agent intellect (though *actus intelligibilium*) is not a reason for the human intellect to be intelligible in act, because it is the reason for the nature of corporeal things to be intelligible in act. It is not a light that is seen in the corporeal things, but rather a light that allows the corporeal things to be seen. It is not an act in the objective sense (intelligible), but in an agent sense (making intelligible); that is, if the agent intellect were intelligible in an objective sense, it would allow the intellect to be known by itself, which is what Aquinas is here denying. The agent intellect perfects the phantasm by making it intelligible in act: in this sense it is its act. It is also act because every active potency is active insofar as it is able to communicate a perfection and this, in turn, implies a certain perfection (nothing can give what it does not have).

Though the following text refers to the act of the possible intellect, it is helpful to see what St. Thomas thinks about all of these things. The act of the intellect is not the perfection that is understood:

> The intelligent act of the human intellect is not the act and perfection of the material nature understood, as if the nature of the material thing and intelligent act could be understood by one act; just as a thing and its perfection are understood by one act. Hence the act whereby the intellect understands a stone is distinct from the act whereby it understands that it understands a stone; and so on.[565]

Granted that it is not the possible intellect, it would be really difficult to suggest that this "*actus et perfectio naturae intellectae materialis*" is the agent intellect because, for

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[564] 87, 1 ad 2: "Non autem intellectus humanus, qui vel est omnino in potentia respectu intelligibilium, sicut intellectus possibilis; vel est actus intelligibilium quae abstrahuntur a phantasmatibus, sicut intellectus agens."

[565] 87, 3 ad 2: "Dicendum quod ipsum intelligere humanum non est actus et perfectio naturae intellectae materialis, ut sic possit uno actu intelligi natura rei materialis et ipsum intelligere, sicut uno actu intelligitur res cum sua perfectione. Unde alius est actus quo intellectus intelligit lapidem, et alius est actus quo intelligit se intelligere lapidem, et sic deinde." The edition of www.corpusthomisticum.org has "inde."

Aquinas, it means "*natura rei materialis*" and "*lapidem*." As has been shown previously, the object of the possible intellect is the universal nature of the corporeal thing.

In the following section of 88, 1, c., Aquinas is explaining Averroes' doctrine about the union of the separate agent intellect with the human intellect. For Averroes, the agent intellect is like a form of the things that are understood:

> For since we understand by means of both the active intellect and intelligible objects […] it is clear that the active intellect must be compared to the objects understood, either as the principal agent is to the instrument, or as form to matter. For an action is ascribed to two principles in one of these two ways; to a principal agent and to an instrument, as cutting to the workman and the saw; to a form and its subject, as heating to heat and fire. In both these ways the active intellect can be compared to the intelligible object as perfection is to the perfectible, and as act is to potentiality.[566]

Note the smooth transition from agent and instrument to act and potency. Aquinas rejects the overall doctrine, but he does not seem to reject this use of the term "act", as will be seen. The partial argument concludes that, supposing knowing to be receptive, and because what is received is received with its perfection, both the intellectual object and the intellectual light are received in the possible intellect, as the perfect thing with its perfection. "Now a subject [receives what is perfect and] its perfection at one and the same time, as the reception of what is actually visible synchronizes with the reception of light in

[566] 88, 1, c.: "Cum enim nos intelligamus per intellectum agentem et per intelligibilia speculata […] necesse est quod intellectus agens comparetur ad intellecta speculata vel sicut agens principale ad instrumenta, vel sicut forma ad materiam. His enim duobus modis attribuitur actio aliqua duobus principiis, principali quidem agenti et instrumento, sicut sectio artifici et serrae; formae autem et subiecto, sicut calefactio calori et igni. Sed utroque modo intellectus agens comparabitur ad intelligibilia speculata sicut perfectio ad perfectibile, et actus ad potentiam."

the eye. Therefore the passive intellect receives the intelligible object and the active intellect together.”[567]

This is the way, for Averroes, in which the human intellect is able to unite itself in some way to the separate agent intellect and so, through it, understand the other separate substances, thus attaining beatitude. Here, the point of interest, however, is what Aquinas says about this union of the agent intellect with the possible intellect, i.e., how he qualifies it. Is the agent intellect a perfection of the object insofar as it (the agent intellect) is seen? Is it received objectively?

It would seem that, even for Averroes, this union of the separate agent intellect and the human intellect does not so much allow the human intellect to know the agent intellect (as object), but rather allows the human intellect to know what is known by the agent intellect (and because of this, in the end, to know the agent intellect itself). In any case, it is clear that for Aquinas the agent intellect is not what is known because, in this life, both the agent intellect and the possible intellect are referred to the material things. Also, in this article, the agent intellect as light is not the object, but a principle of the understanding of the object.

> Secondly, […] because in the above explanation, the active intellect, supposing it to be a separate substance, would not be joined to us in its substance, but only in its light, as participated in things understood; and [this being conjoined] would not extend to the other acts of the active intellect so as to enable us to understand immaterial substances; just as when we see colors set off by the sun, we are not

[567] 88, 1, c.: “Simul autem recipitur in aliquo perfectum et perfectio; sicut visibile in actu et lumen in pupilla. Simul igitur in intellectu possibili recipiuntur intellecta speculata et intellectus agens.”

> united to the substance of the sun so as to act like the sun, but its light only is united to us, that we may see the colors.[568]

For Aquinas, in the hypothesis of a separate agent intellect, something similar to what happens in ocular vision would be the case. The sun is also a separate light. The colours are "*illuminatos*" as the light of the agent intellect "is participated" by the intellectual objects ("*intellectis speculativis*").[569] But St. Thomas also says that the light, in both cases, is united *to us* ("*unietur nobis*" for the intellect, "*nobis unitur*" for ocular vision). So, is the light act of the object or act of the faculty? In both cases, Aquinas understands the light as something united to the faculty in order to know other things, and participated in some way in the objects *in order to know the objects themselves.* So, even accepting that the light is somehow act of the objects, he does not take it here as an *objective* perfection.

The agent intellect and the possible intellect, as principles of understanding, are referred only to material things by their mode of action in this life. At the end of the corpus, Aquinas says clearly that the agent intellect is referred to the material things as active, as making them intelligible.

> As was shown above, the active intellect is not a separate substance; but a faculty of the soul, extending itself actively to the same objects to which the passive intellect

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[568] 88, 1, c.: "Secundo quia, secundum modum praedictum, intellectus agens, si est substantia separata, non unietur [www.corpusthomisticum.org has: "uniretur"] nobis secundum suam substantiam; sed solum lumen eius, secundum quod participatur in intellectis speculativis; et non quantum ad alias actiones intellectus agentis, ut possimus per hoc intelligere substantias immateriales. Sicut dum videmus colores illuminatos a sole, non unitur nobis substantia solis, ut possimus actiones solis agere; sed solum nobis unitur lumen solis ad visionem colorum."

[569] The edition of www.corpusthomisticum.org has "speculatis." The Ottawa edition has "speculativis" which gives the possibility of reading "speculative intellects" as well. It would not affect dramatically the meaning of the text, but this alternative reading seems less accurate, because this participation seems to be the "counter balance" of the "*illuminatos*" referred to the colours. In other words, Aquinas means here that what participates the light is the object, not the intellect, although he also says that the light is united to the faculty ("*nobis*").

> extends receptively; because, as is stated,[570] the passive intellect is 'all things potentially,' and the active intellect is 'all things in act.' Therefore both intellects, according to the present state of life, extend to material things only, which are made actually intelligible by the active intellect, and are received in the passive intellect. Hence in the present state of life we cannot understand separate immaterial substances in themselves, either by the passive or by the active intellect.[571]

That which is made intelligible is also that which is received: "*materialia sola.*"[572] St. Thomas is talking about the *res intellecta*; we do not understand separate substances but material things (= *naturas corporum*). In other words, he does not mean that what is received in the human intellect is the phantasm in its particularity (*materialiter*), but that the (real) proportionate object of the human intellect is not the separate substances in themselves (this is the point of the article), but the material things (*materialia*). What he says is that what is made intelligible by the agent intellect is the material things themselves, and these same material things (i.e., their nature), in an intelligible mode of being, are what is received in the possible intellect. St. Thomas is referring here to what he has said previously,[573] and he is not talking any longer about "act" but about "making intelligible" the material things.

It seems clear that the agent intellect as *actus intelligibilium* does not mean for St. Thomas that the agent intellect is something that is understood, but rather that it is a

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[570] *De Anima iii*, 5.

[571] 88, 1, c.: "Sexto, quia supra ostensum est quod intellectus agens non est substantia separata, sed virtus quaedam animae, ad eadem active se extendens, ad quae se extendit intellectus possibilis receptive, quia, ut dicitur in *III De Anima*, intellectus possibilis est quo est omnia fieri, intellectus agens quo est omnia facere. Uterque ergo intellectus se extendit, secundum statum praesentis vitae, ad materialia sola; quae intellectus agens facit intelligibilia actu, et recipiuntur in intellectu possibili. Unde secundum statum praesentis vitae, neque per intellectum possibilem, neque per intellectum agentem, possumus intelligere substantias immateriales secundum seipsas."

[572] This is also the sense of "*omnia facere*" and "*omnia fieri*", at least in this context.

[573] Cf. 79, 4.

principle of understanding other things. Can it be said to be a formal principle? St. Thomas says *actus*, but *actus* is an analogous notion. Aquinas would say that the light of the sun is the act of the colours insofar as it makes them visible. It is *in* the colours, but making *them* visible, not making itself visible. The reason we know there is no light is that we cannot see anything: "Turn the light on, please!" The light does not modify the colours, but makes them visible; the light is not the colour, it is not what is seen, but that by which we see. These, of course, are not scientific claims, but the example St. Thomas uses to enable us to understand things which depend on principles. The point is that the light is not the object of vision, as the agent intellect is not the object of understanding. The agent intellect is act as making intelligible in its mode of being the universal nature of corporeal things, and not as providing intelligibility as content. The light does not constitute the known in its universality, but makes this universality visible to the eye of intelligence.[574]

[574] Cf. *In I Sent* d.3, q.4, a.5, c.: "According to the philosophers, there is another way to understand that the human soul understands always itself, insofar as everything that is understood must be illuminated by the agent intellect and received in the possible intellect. Hence, just as in every colour is seen the corporeal light, so in every intelligible is seen the light of the agent intellect: not, however, as object, but as a means by which knowing happens." (my trans.) [Alio tamen modo, secundum philosophos, intelligitur quod anima semper se intelligit, eo quod omne quod intelligitur, non intelligitur nisi illustratum lumine intellectus agentis, et receptum in intellectu possibili. Unde sicut in omni colore videtur lumen corporale, ita in omni intelligibili videtur lumen intellectus agentis; non tamen in ratione objecti sed in ratione medii cognoscendi.]; *De Ver* 14, 8, ad 4: "In some sense light is the object of sight and in another sense not. For, since light is seen by our sight only if through reflection or in some other way it is united to a body having a surface, it is not called the essential object of sight. This is, rather, color, which is always in a body having a surface. However, in so far as nothing can be seen except by reason of light, light itself is said to be the first visible thing…" [Lumen quodammodo est obiectum visus et quodammodo non. In quantum enim lux non videtur nostris visibus nisi per hoc quod ad aliquod corpus terminatum, per reflexionem, vel alio modo coniungitur, dicitur non esse per se visus obiectum, sed magis color, qui semper est in corpore terminato. In quantum autem nihil nisi per lucem videri potest, lux primum visibile esse dicitur…]

Therefore, if what is meant is "act" as "active principle", insofar as the active principle in a sense participates its own perfection, or what is meant is "formal principle" in the same sense, then the agent intellect can—in a Thomistic sense also—be called "act" and "formal principle" of the object of knowing, insofar as it contributes intelligibility as a mode of being. Aquinas himself uses this expression, and he appears to do so in the sense explained. But, if by formal principle what is meant is that the intelligible *content* of knowing is contributed to the material of sensibility by the agent intellect, then what is being said is no longer about Aquinas' notion of agent intellect.[575]

Two groups of texts have been examined; namely, some texts which seem to suggest a formal a priori in human understanding, as is required in a Kantian epistemology; and a few other texts which could be interpreted as saying that the agent intellect is a formal a priori of intellectual knowing as performative. There is not enough evidence in any of them to support the claim that Aquinas considers the agent intellect a formal a priori, in the sense of contributing intelligibility as content. The following texts should help to show more clearly that, for Aquinas, the agent intellect is that which provides intelligibility as a mode of being and is, therefore, a metaphysical a priori of intellectual knowing as receptive of objective content.

[575] Here is an interesting text from Zagal Arreguín, in which the author expresses very well what is meant here by a metaphysical a priori, and by the agent intellect as act of the intelligible: "What makes it therefore in act with respect to inteligible objects is the fact that it is an active immaterial force able to assimilate other things to itself, i.e., immaterialize them. In this way it renders actually intelligible something that was only potentially intelligible: like light, which without containing any particular color, brings colors into act" (Zagal Arreguín, 367).

2) The Agent Intellect as a Metaphysical A Priori

Although much has already been anticipated, and much of what will here be said depends on the previous reflections, it is time to address more directly the characterization of the agent intellect as a metaphysical, not a formal, a priori of intellectual knowing. Introductory remarks are offered to begin with, followed by an examination of the texts.

The agent intellect, for Aquinas, is a metaphysical a priori of intellectual knowing as receptive of objective content. By this is meant that the agent intellect is responsible not for the intelligible content, nor for the universal object, but for the intelligible mode of being of the universal content. The object of understanding is something real outside the mind, but in its real mode of being is not "available" to our intellectual faculty. To this object the agent intellect gives the intelligible mode of being in act by "separating" the real nature from the individual conditions of matter.

This separation is nothing other than a making visible of the specific perfection by divesting it from the particular realization in this individual (doctrine of participation); it should not be understood as a separation in reality, i.e., a separation of the content in its existence.[576] The universal content is abstracted (= made visible) by the agent intellect but it is understood (= seen) in the phantasm, i.e., it is "read – into" the particular.[577] The separation of the agent intellect is not a separation of the content, but a making visible of the universal content of the phantasm; and although it implies the production of a separate species (the *impressa*), its content is read into the phantasm (= *conversio ad phantasmata*

[576] Cf. 85, 1 ad 1; *In III De Anima* 6, 261-271.

[577] This is related again to the issue of the distinction between abstraction as act of the possible intellect and of the agent intellect (cf. Cromp, 16ff.; *Chapter 4*, section 1).

as *modus intelligendi*). The agent intellect separates the nature in its mode of being, but in such a way that the nature itself may be seen in the phantasm (by the possible intellect). The nature is seen in a separate mode of being, but not as separate from the phantasm. What is seen is the *quidditas* of the phantasm. The content is distinct indeed, not insofar as it exists or could exist separately from the sensible content, but insofar as it is a common perfection that is not identified with its particular realization in the matter. Matter is a sign of limitation, which implies the limitation of a perfection; a perfection of itself does not say limitation; therefore the perfection that is limited is different from its limitation, and can be considered without reference to its limitation (i.e., in itself or *"absolutely"*).

Which texts support this interpretation of the agent intellect? In subsection 2.1, following, is the *textus princeps*[578] which will be re-examined now mindful of our previous path; then, in 2.2, are other texts helpful in stressing that the agent intellect cannot be interpreted as a formal a priori, but solely as a metaphysical a priori; finally, in 2.3, are texts helpful in understanding the sense in which Aquinas sees the agent intellect as a light, which will be studied in connection with the interpretation at hand.

2.1. The *textus princeps*

In 79, 3, the problem is whether or not there is a need to postulate an agent intellect in the human soul. A comparison with Plato clarifies the point:

> According to the opinion of Plato, there is no need for an active intellect in order to make things actually intelligible; but perhaps in order to provide intellectual light to the intellect, as will be explained farther on. For Plato supposed that the forms of natural things subsisted apart from matter, and consequently that they are

[578] 79, 3, c..

> intelligible: since a thing is actually intelligible from the very fact that it is immaterial.[579]

It is evident that the role of the agent intellect is to make (the object) intelligible in act; it is also evident that, for Aquinas, the object of human understanding for both Plato and Aristotle is the form (nature, species) of corporeal things. St. Thomas will not here (again) show the reasons for his disagreement with Plato. The important point is now that, because Plato considers the object of human understanding as separate from matter in its real mode of being, that object is – for Plato – already intelligible in act and, therefore, no need of an agent intellect *in the sense mentioned previously* (as making intelligible in act) arises for him. This is the reason for the clarification "*sed forte ad praebendum*" etc.: the need of an agent intellect *as making intelligible in act* makes no sense in the system of Plato, because the object of human understanding in its real being is already separate from matter and, therefore, already intelligible in act.

Aristotle's position is clearly stated: "But since Aristotle did not allow that forms of natural things exist apart from matter, and as forms existing in matter are not actually intelligible; it follows that the natures of forms of the sensible things which we understand are not actually intelligible."[580] The object of human understanding for both philosophers, at least here for Aquinas, is the same: the forms of the corporeal things. The principle for resolving the question is exactly the same: something is intelligible in act only if it is

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[579] 79, 3, c.: "Secundum opinionem Platonis, nulla necessitas erat ponere intellectum agentem ad faciendum intelligibilia in actu; sed forte ad praebendum lumen intelligibile intelligenti, ut infra dicetur. Posuit enim Plato formas rerum naturalium sine materia subsistere, et per consequens eas intelligibiles esse, quia ex hoc est aliquid intelligibile actu, quod est immateriale."

[580] 79, 3, c.: "Sed quia Aristoteles non posuit formas rerum naturalium subsistere sine materia; formae autem in materia existentes non sunt intelligibiles actu, sequebatur quod naturae seu formae rerum sensibilium, quas intelligimus, non essent intelligibiles actu."

separate from matter. The difference between the two philosophers cannot be more clearly established: the respective modes of being of the object of human understanding differ because, whereas for Plato it is intelligible in act, for Aristotle it is imbedded in the matter and, therefore, not intelligible in act.

Aquinas continues: "Now nothing is reduced from potentiality to act except by something in act; as the senses [are] made actual by what is actually sensible."[581] Here "*ens actu*" is the intelligible in act, as the comparison with the senses makes clear, and also the context: St. Thomas has just said that the natures which are the object of our understanding are not intelligible in act. What he is saying now is this: we understand the natures of things, but they are not intelligible in act; now, if understanding is to happen (as the passage of the intellect from potency to act), those natures need to be intelligible in act. Therefore, he concludes that the condition of possibility of human understanding is a faculty making intelligible in act the proportionate object of human understanding: "We must therefore assign on the part of the intellect some power to make things actually intelligible, by abstraction of the species from material conditions. And such is the necessity for an active intellect."[582]

The agent intellect, therefore, is a metaphysical a priori insofar as it is an efficiency previous to knowing itself, affecting the mode of being (not the content) of the object of human understanding. It is a priori, not insofar as it is an arbitrary invention previous to the

[581] 79, 3, c.: "Nihil autem reducitur de potentia in actum, nisi per aliquod ens actu, sicut sensus fit in actu per sensibile in actu."

[582] 79, 3, c.: "Oportebat igitur ponere aliquam virtutem ex parte intellectus, quae faceret intelligibilia in actu, per abstractionem specierum a conditionibus materialibus. Et haec est necessitas ponendi intellectum agentem."

analysis of the fact of human knowing, but precisely insofar is it explains the Thomistic fact of human understanding as it happens. If we do understand the nature of corporeal things but these natures are not, in their subsistence, intelligible in act, there must be something which explains the fact that we understand them. This is the necessity and the role of the agent intellect for Aquinas.

2.2. Not a Formal but a Metaphysical A Priori

Other texts can help us to confirm and to qualify this interpretation: first (2.2.a), those suggesting that the agent intellect is not a formal a priori; second (2.2.b), those referring the origin of the intelligible content to experience; finally (2.2.c), texts from other works and authors portraying the agent intellect as a metaphysical a priori.

2.2.a. Not a Formal A Priori

In the following, the agent intellect is not a formal a priori:

> If the relation of the active intellect to the passive were that of the active object to a power, as, for instance, of the visible in act to the sight; it would follow that we could understand all things instantly, since the active intellect is that which makes all things (in act). But now the active intellect is not an object, rather is it that whereby the objects are made to be in act…[583]

[583] 79, 4 ad 3: "Si intellectus agens compararetur ad intellectum possibilem ut obiectum agens ad potentiam, sicut visibile in actu ad visum; sequeretur quod statim omnia intelligeremus, cum intellectus agens sit quo est omnia facere. Nunc autem non se habet ut obiectum, sed ut faciens obiecta in actu…" Let me also give the partial translation of Stump (cf. 256-257, her square brackets): "If the active intellect were related to the possible intellect as an active object is related to a power ... , it would follow that we would immediately understand all things ... But, as it is, the active intellect is related not as an [active] object, but rather as what actualizes [cognitive] objects." Cf. *In III De Anima* 4, 147-162. The following text is not speaking directly of the agent intellect but may be helpful, *In III De Anima* 1, 170-180: "The early philosophers' [said] that intellect must be compounded of all things if it can know all things. But if it knew all things, as containing them all in itself already, it would be an ever-actual intellect, and never merely in potency…" [Dicebant enim eum ad hoc quod cognosceret omnia, esse compositum ex omnibus. Si autem esset cognoscitivus omnium quia haberet in se omnia, esset semper intellectus in actu et nunquam in potential…]

This is an important text. First, the agent intellect is denied a formal objectivity; that is, the agent intellect in no way is what is understood (it is not the intelligible as that which actualizes the faculty of understanding). However, the reason for which it cannot be the intelligible object is even more important: the agent intellect is that by which everything is made (intelligible). If this capacity, or rather *virtuality*, of making everything intelligible were to be understood in a formal sense, or objectively, the formal *content* of every act of understanding would be already included in the agent intellect, and so we would understand everything immediately. Instead, the agent intellect is not to be understood as object (thus formally perfecting the faculty) but, rather, as metaphysically perfecting the object (insofar as the agent intellect makes it intelligible in act). For Aquinas, to be the object of understanding and to make this object intelligible are two different things.

A similar text is 88, 3 ad 1. Here again the agent intellect is not the object of knowing, but its principle. This text could be related to the previous one, in the sense that Aquinas denies that the virtuality of the agent intellect (here as a participation of the First Truth) is something objective. If, in the previous text, it is denied that we know everything (which would be the case if the agent intellect were the object of understanding), here it is denied that God is the first object of knowing, which could be the case if the light by which we know everything were itself known. St. Thomas points out also that, in human understanding, the light as principle of understanding is not God Himself but a perfection participated from God.

> We see and judge of all things in the light of the first truth, forasmuch as the light itself of our mind, whether natural or gratuitous, is nothing else than [a certain] impression of the first truth upon it, as stated above. Hence, as the light itself of our

> intellect is not the object it understands [but that by means of which it understands], much less can it be said that God is the first object known by our intellect.[584]

That the agent intellect is a metaphysical a priori, insofar as it is previous to knowing itself, could be taken from the following passage as well: "Nevertheless there is a distinction between the power of the active intellect and of the passive intellect: because as regards the same object, the active power which makes the object to be in act must be distinct from the passive power, which is moved by the object existing in act."[585]

Although in the following texts *intellectus* stands for the possible intellect, it is still relevant for the present purposes that the perfection of the object of human understanding is not the intellectual operation itself, but the nature of the corporeal thing. This is related to the characterization of human understanding not as performative of the object but as receptive:

> The intelligent act of the human intellect is not the act and perfection of the material nature understood, as if the nature of the material thing and intelligent act could be understood by one act; just as a thing and its perfection are understood by one act. Hence the act whereby the intellect understands a stone is distinct from the act whereby it understands that it understands a stone; and so on.[586]

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[584] 88, 3 ad 1: "In luce primae veritatis omnia intelligimus et iudicamus, inquantum ipsum lumen intellectus nostri, sive naturale sive gratuitum, nihil aliud est quam quaedam impressio veritatis primae, ut supra dictum est. Unde cum ipsum lumen intellectus nostri non se habeat ad intellectum nostrum sicut quod intelligitur, sed sicut quo intelligitur; multo minus Deus est id quod primo a nostro intellectu intelligitur." It seems clear that this *lumen* is the agent intellect. Cf. *De Spirit. Creat.* a. 10 ad 1, and *S.Th.* I, 54, 4.

[585] 79, 7, c.: "Diversificatur tamen potentia intellectus agentis, et intellectus possibilis, quia respectu eiusdem obiecti, aliud principium oportet esse potentiam activam, quae facit obiectum esse in actu; et aliud potentiam passivam, quae movetur ab obiecto in actu existente."

[586] 87, 3 ad 2: "Dicendum quod ipsum intelligere humanum non est actus et perfectio naturae intellectae materialis, ut sic possit uno actu intelligi natura rei materialis et ipsum intelligere, sicut uno actu intelligitur res cum sua perfectione. Unde alius est actus quo intellectus intelligit lapidem, et alius est actus quo intelligit se intelligere lapidem, et sic inde."

> "Now the ultimate perfection of the intellect consists in its own operation: for this is not an act tending to something else in which lies the perfection of the work accomplished, as building is the perfection of the thing built; but it remains in the agent as its perfection and act, as is said [in] Metaph. ix."[587]

Clearly, for Aquinas, it is not the object that has to be (objectively) perfected by the intellectual operation, but it is the intellect that is perfected by the object. The action of the agent intellect, therefore, must be conceived as perfecting the object in another way (metaphysically, that is to say, in its mode of being) and this activity must be placed previous to understanding itself (with a priority of nature, not only temporal). The text of 76, 2 ad 4 points us in the same direction: because the object of understanding has an autonomous existence, the action of the agent intellect has nothing to do with its content but with its mode of being: "… whereas the nature of the thing understood is indeed outside the soul, but the mode according to which it exists outside the soul is not the mode according to which it is understood."[588]

That the agent intellect is not a formal a priori, as origin of the intelligible content, relates to Aquinas' rejecting the identification between the agent intellect and the habit of first principles.[589]

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[587] 87, 3, c.: "Ultima autem perfectio intellectus est eius operatio, non enim est sicut actio tendens in alterum, quae sit perfectio operati, sicut aedificatio aedificati; sed manet in operante ut perfectio et actus eius, ut dicitur in *IX Metaphys.*."

[588] 76, 2 ad 4: "… [N]atura autem rei quae intelligitur, est quidem extra animam, sed non habet illum modum essendi extra animam, secundum quem intelligitur."

[589] Cf. in this *Chapter*, section 1.5, "Naturaliter nota vel indita."

2.2.b. The Origin of the Intelligible Content

The following text[590] is important because it shows clearly the difference between the agent intellect as a metaphysical a priori (and *principium quo*) and the a posteriority of the species, and so, of the object of human understanding. One can read between the lines many historical issues related to the importance of St. Augustine in the scholarly milieu of the time, but these need not distract from the immediate purpose. The question is whether we know everything *in rationibus aeternis*. St. Thomas gives an affirmative answer, but first clarifies what it means in this case to know "in" something. In this case, it does not mean to know *in rationibus aeternis* as in an object of vision (as whoever looks at a mirror can see in the mirror all that is there reflected). This it could mean for Plato, according to whom we participate *objectively* in the eternal ideas in the present state of life. St. Thomas wants to propose instead a *subjective* participation: the participation of the light by which the objects are seen. "Secondly, one thing is said to be known in another as in a principle of knowledge: thus we might say that we see in the sun what we see by the sun."[591] The shift from "*in*" to "*per*" from the beginning is significant; that is, "*in*" can embrace several meanings, but "*per*" is more restricted. "And thus we must needs say that the human soul knows all things in the eternal types, since by participation of these types we know all things."[592] This second precision is crucial. St. Thomas has already said that the eternal ideas are one with the divine essence and, therefore, just as they cannot be the direct object of vision in this life,

[590] 84, 5, c..

[591] 84, 5, c.: "Alio modo dicitur aliquid cognosci in aliquo sicut in cognitionis principio; sicut si dicamus quod in sole videntur ea quae videntur per solem."

[592] 84, 5, c.: "Et sic necesse est dicere quod anima humana omnia cognoscat in rationibus aeternis, per quarum *participationem omnia cognoscimus.*"

neither are they directly the principle by which we see. We possess a participation of the uncreated light, and it is only in that sense that we know by the divine light: "For the intellectual light itself which is in us, is nothing else than a participated likeness of the uncreated light, in which are contained the eternal types."[593]

This mention of the fact that the divine light contains the eternal ideas may lead one to think that the participated light would also contain, at least in some way, the ideas of all things. Two things actually prevent us from misreading Aquinas. The first is to remember that, for him, intellectual life is realized in creation by degrees, the least of which is the human soul. The soul participates only a "power" to understand, which is in potency of all of the intelligible objects, and a "light" which is also in potency of making intelligible the nature of corporeal things. We participate [from] the intelligence of God insofar as we have the capacity to know, but we actually know nothing "by nature," i.e., from the beginning. The second thing making it more difficult to misread St. Thomas is simply the rest of the passage, where he clearly says that, besides this light as participation of the eternal ideas, we need intelligible species coming from the things themselves:

> Whence it is written [in *Psalm* 4], 'Many say: Who showeth us good things?' which question the Psalmist answers, 'The light of Thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us,' as though he were to say: By the seal[594] of the Divine light in us, all things are made known to us. But since besides the intellectual light which is in us, intelligible species, which are derived from things, are required in order for us to have knowledge of material things; therefore this same knowledge is not due merely to a

[593] 84, 5, c.: "Ipsum enim lumen intellectuale quod est in nobis, nihil est aliud quam quaedam participata similitudo luminis increati, in quo continentur rationes aeternae."

[594] The word "*sigillationem*" here stands for participation, in the sense of a created effect from God in the human soul ("*in nobis*"). By this light, all things are shown to us, insofar as the light makes visible the objects.

> participation of the eternal types, as the Platonists held, maintaining that the mere participation of ideas sufficed for knowledge.[595]

It is clear, then, that the participation in the divine ideas, here and for Aquinas, is on the part of the agent intellect and not on the part of the intelligible species. Of course, the species themselves, insofar as they come from the things, which are in turn participations of the divine ideas by creation, [the species] could also be considered "participations" of the eternal ideas.[596] But this participation is not "direct," so to speak, as it is direct in the case of the agent intellect (at least insofar as we receive it from God in creation). That is why Aquinas says "*non per solam participationem rationum aeternarum*," that is to say, not by means of the agent intellect alone, because we need the intelligible species also.

Finally, it may not be out of place to remark that Aquinas considers the agent intellect to be distinct from the *intelligible* species, the agent intellect coming from God and the intelligible species coming from the things themselves. It is most significant because that which comes from the things is not just the phantasm, as the material of sensibility to be informed, but the intelligible species. Therefore, some intelligible aspect comes from the things themselves. Which aspect? It is the objective aspect and, therefore, what here has been called the intelligible content as opposed to the intelligible mode of being. This must be so because the purpose of Aquinas in the article is to show that we do not participate

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[595] 84, 5, c.: "Unde in Psalmo IV, dicitur, *multi dicunt, quis ostendit nobis bona?* Cui quaestioni Psalmista respondet, dicens, *signatum est super nos lumen vultus tui, domine*. Quasi dicat, per ipsam sigillationem divini luminis in nobis, omnia demonstrantur. Quia tamen praeter lumen intellectuale in nobis, exiguntur species intelligibiles a rebus acceptae, ad scientiam de rebus materialibus habendam; ideo non per solam participationem rationum aeternarum de rebus materialibus notitiam habemus, sicut Platonici posuerunt quod sola idearum participatio sufficit ad scientiam habendam."

[596] Cf. 84, 4 ad 1, quoted on the next page.

from God the object of understanding, but a light that is principle of understanding the objects. In order to know, then, it is not enough to have light, but we need the things that are seen. These things, of course, imply the completed action of the agent intellect, not however in order to be themselves, but in order to be seen. The intelligibility of the species, as a mode of being, does come from the agent intellect, and not from the things themselves; but *what* is intelligible comes from the things, and in that sense, the intelligible species come from the things themselves.

This interpretation seems confirmed by the following text from the previous article: "The intelligible species which are participated by our intellect are reduced, as to their first cause, to a first principle which is by its essence intelligible—namely, God. But they proceed from that principle by means of the sensible forms and material things, from which we gather knowledge, as Dionysius says."[597] Aquinas is here trying to deny that we receive intelligible species from the separate substances. Again, what is at stake is a certain objective participation in knowing. But, this time Aquinas' concern is to show that, if we can speak of a certain participation from God regarding the content of knowing, this participation is "indirect," through the forms of the natural things from which we receive

[597] 84, 4 ad 1: "Species intelligibiles quas participat noster intellectus, reducuntur sicut in primam causam in aliquod principium per suam essentiam intelligibile, scilicet in Deum. Sed ab illo principio procedunt mediantibus formis rerum sensibilium et materialium, a quibus scientiam colligimus, ut Dionysius dicit." Another text with the same reference to Dionysius is 76, 5, c.: "Now the intellectual soul, as we have seen above […] in the order of nature, holds the lowest place among intellectual substances; inasmuch as it is not naturally gifted with the knowledge of truth, as the angels are; but has to gather knowledge from individual things by way of the senses, as Dionysius says (Div. Nom. vii)." [Anima autem intellectiva, sicut supra habitum est, secundum naturae ordinem, infimum gradum in substantiis intellectualibus tenet; intantum quod non habet naturaliter sibi inditam notitiam veritatis, sicut Angeli, sed oportet quod eam colligat ex rebus divisibilibus per viam sensus, ut Dionysius dicit, VII cap. de *Div. Nom*.]

science directly. In other words, what we know is not what is presented to us by the separate substances, but the nature of corporeal things: our faculty cannot know naturally by infused species which exceed its intelligible power. Our faculty can be perfected only by the intelligible perfection of material things, by their form, which in its real mode of being is poor in intelligible content and common to many.[598] This perfection is what we can see thanks to the poor light of the agent intellect. Therefore, the poor intelligibility bestowed by the creative wisdom of God on material creatures is participated by our possible intellect, thanks to an intellectual light (the agent intellect) participated from the Divine Light. The participated light comes from God, but the perfection of the object as known comes not directly from God, but from the material things. By the impression of His light (our own participated light), God allows us to see the intelligibility He bestowed on material creatures insofar as it is *in them*, and not insofar as it is in His divine ideas. In the end, the intellectual content of our knowing can come from the material things because, for Aquinas, there is something intelligible in the material things insofar as, in their natural perfections, they participate of the creative wisdom of God. This is why there is no need of a formal a priori for Aquinas.

A final text regarding the origin of the intelligible content is 76, 2, c. St. Thomas is trying to confute the opinion of those who postulate only one separate intellect for all human beings. Here, he is dealing particularly with the Commentator, who suggests that the

[598] About the degrees of cognitive power and the proportion between cognitive power and object, cf. 85, 1, c.; about the degrees in intellectual power, 76, 5, c. (see previous footnote) and 55, 2, c.; about the division in the intellectual realm as a consequence of the lower status in the scale of beings, cf. 89, 1, c.; Fabro, NMP, 268ff.

reason we ascribe to different subjects the intelligence of the same thing (a stone, in the example) is the numerical diversity of phantasms. But this diversity, for Aquinas, does not imply a numerical distinction of intellectual operations. The diversity of phantasms does not prevent our intelligence from understanding with one operation (and therefore with one intelligible species) the one nature of stone, because the phantasms are "of the same species." What is interesting for the present purposes is this: the reason that the intelligible species is one is that the phantasms are of the same species (i.e., all of them are phantasms of stones, they all *possess* the same nature) and therefore, from all of them, we can abstract only one intelligible species by which we know the one nature of stone. Again, the intelligible content comes from the corporeal things themselves as they are represented by the phantasm of sensibility:

> But the phantasm itself is not a form of the possible intellect; it is the intelligible species abstracted from the phantasm that is a form. Now in one intellect, from different phantasms of the same species, only one intelligible species is abstracted; as appears in one man, in whom there may be different phantasms of a stone; yet from all of them only one intelligible species of a stone is abstracted; by which the intellect of that one man, by one operation, understands the nature of a stone, notwithstanding the diversity of phantasms.[599]

That the origin of the intelligible content comes from experience and is the nature subsisting in sensible things is a doctrine that can be found in both earlier and later works of

[599] 76, 2, c.: "Sed ipsum phantasma non est forma intellectus possibilis, sed species intelligibilis quae a phantasmatibus abstrahitur. In uno autem intellectu a phantasmatibus diversis eiusdem speciei non abstrahitur nisi una species intelligibilis. Sicut in uno homine apparet, in quo possunt esse diversa phantasmata lapidis, et tamen ab omnibus eis abstrahitur una species intelligibilis lapidis, per quam intellectus unius hominis operatione una intelligit naturam lapidis, non obstante diversitate phantasmatum."

Aquinas. We will begin with the earlier texts, and quote in footnote some corresponding later texts.

The following text also helps us to understand that the forms we know go from the mind of God to our minds *through the things themselves*, in such a way that they impress their forms in us:

> That statement of Algazel is to be understood of our knowledge, which is acquired by the [things impressing their likenesses] upon our souls. The opposite is true of God's cognition, for it is from His intellect that forms flow into creatures. Our knowledge is the impressing of things in our souls; but the forms of things are [a certain] impressing of the divine knowledge in things.[600]

The "active" role of the things themselves in intellectual knowing is clear in the following text also. This "activity" regards the content of knowing, insofar as the things themselves "provide" intelligence with the perfection of their forms. Only in the case of artifacts do the things themselves "receive" their formal perfection from intelligence.

> Now, this form, which is other than the intellect, is sometimes the cause of the thing whose likeness it is. We have an evident example of this in the practical intellect, whose form is the cause of the thing done. But sometimes this form is the effect of the thing, as is clearly the case with our speculative intellect when it receives its knowledge from things.[601] Therefore, whenever an intellect knows a thing through a

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[600] *De Ver.* 2, 1 ad 6: "Verbum illud Algazelis intelligendum est de scientia nostra, quae in nobis acquiritur per hoc quod res imprimunt similitudines suas in animas nostras; sed in cognitione Dei est e converso, quia ab eius intellectu effluunt formae in omnes creaturas; unde sicut scientia in nobis est sigillatio rerum in animabus nostris, ita e converso formae rerum non sunt nisi quaedam sigillatio divinae scientiae in rebus."

[601] Cf. *Q.D. De Anima*, a.2, ad 15: "It is natural to the human soul to apprehend intelligible truth in a manner inferior to that proper to superior spiritual substances, namely, by [receiving it] from sensible things…" [Iste modus cognoscendi est naturalis animae, ut percipiat intelligibilem veritatem infra modum quo percipiunt spirituales substantiae superiores, *accipiendo scilicet eam ex sensibilibus*…]; *Summa I*, 51, 1 in Lambert, 85: "It belongs to the human soul to be united to a body, because it is imperfect and exists potentially in the genus of intellectual substances, not having the fulness of knowledge in its own nature, but acquiring it from sensible things through the bodily senses." [Humanae animae competit uniri corpori, quia est imperfecta et in potentia existens in

> likeness which is not the essence of the knower, then the intellect is perfected by something other than itself; but if that likeness should happen to be the cause of the thing, in that case the intellect will be perfected only by the likeness, and not at all by the thing whose likeness it is. For example, a house is not the perfection of the artistic conception, but rather the contrary. On the other hand, if the likeness is caused by the thing, then the perfection of the intellect will be, as it were, the thing in an active sense, but its likeness in a formal sense.[602]

St. Thomas parallels senses and intelligence regarding the origin of the content. This suggests also that the difference in the content (sensible and intelligible) does not mean a difference in the receptivity of knowing. Both faculties *receive their content* from the things themselves: "What is understood or sensed moves the sense or intellect only [insofar as] the sense knowledge or intellectual knowledge is received from things. Divine cognition is

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genere intellectualium substantiarum, *non habens* in sua natura plenitudinem scientiae, sed acquirens eam per sensus corporeos *a sensibilibus rebus*.]

[602] *De Ver.* 2, 3, ad 1: "Haec autem forma, quae est aliud ab intellectu, quandoque quidem comparatur ad rem cuius est similitudo, ut causa eius: sicut patet in intellectu practico, cuius forma est causa rei operatae; quandoque autem est effectus rei, sicut patet in intellectu nostro speculativo accipiente cognitionem a rebus. Quandocumque ergo intellectus cognoscit rem aliquam per similitudinem quae non est intelligentis essentia, tunc intellectus perficitur aliquo alio a se; sed si illa similitudo sit causa rei, perficietur tantum similitudine, et nullo modo re cuius est similitudo, sicut domus non est perfectio artis, sed magis e converso. Si autem sit effectus rei: tunc res etiam erit quodammodo perfectio intellectus active scilicet, similitudo vero eius formaliter." Cf. *In Met.* 7, lect. 6, 1404-1405: "And [Aristotle] does this because the form present in the matter of things made by art proceeds from the form present in the mind. In the case of natural things, however, the opposite is true. Now the form present in the mind differs from the one present in matter; for in matter the forms of contraries are different and opposed, but in the mind contraries have in a sense the same form. And this is true because forms present in matter exist for the sake of the being of the things informed, but forms present in the mind exist according to the mode of what is knowable or intelligible." [Et hoc ideo, quia a forma quae est in anima nostra, procedit forma quae est in materia in artificialibus; *in naturalibus autem e contrario*. Haec autem forma quae est in anima, differt a forma, quae est in materia. Nam contrariorum formae in materia sunt diversae et contrariae, in anima autem est quodammodo una species contrariorum. Et hoc ideo, quia formae in materia sunt *propter esse* rerum formatarum: formae autem in anima sunt *secundum modum cognoscibilem et intelligibilem*.] The form in the thing itself is the source of the form in the mind, as in the text of *De Veritate*, and here the different mode of being of the form is also suggested.

not of this kind; hence, the argument does not follow."[603] The difference in the mode of being (already studied) is that which allows St. Thomas to speak simultaneously of this reception of content and of its origin in the sensible experience. That is to say, *what* is in the intellect was previously in the senses, not insofar as the same phantasm has a different mode of being, but insofar as the different intelligible content subsisted in the sensible thing with a different mode of being:

> That axiom is to be understood as applying only to our intellect, which receives its knowledge from things. For a thing is led by gradual steps from its own material conditions to the immateriality of the intellect through the mediation of the immateriality of sense. Consequently, whatever is in our intellect must have previously been in the senses. This, however, does not take place in the divine intellect.[604]

Another passage from *De Veritate* tells us clearly that the intelligible species comes from the things themselves *regarding the content*, not regarding its mode of being in the mind: "The forms in our intellects, however, are received from things. Hence, they do not excel things, and are, as it were, equal to them as far as representation goes, even though

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[603] *De Ver.* 2, 3, ad 14: "Intelligibile et sensibile non movent sensum vel intellectum nisi secundum quod cognitio sensitiva vel intellectiva a rebus accipitur; non est autem talis divina cognitio; et ideo ratio non procedit." Cf. ad 15.

[604] *De Ver.* 2, 3, ad 19: "Verbum illud est intelligendum de intellectu nostro, qui *a rebus scientiam accipit*; gradatim enim res a sua materialitate ad immaterialitatem intellectus deducitur, scilicet mediante immaterialitate sensus; et ideo *oportet ut quod est in intellectu nostro, prius in sensu fuerit*; quod in intellectu divino locum non habet." Cf. *De Ver* 8, 6, c. in Lambert, 83: "Similarly, our possible intellect can understand nothing before it is brought into act by an intelligible form. Only then can it understand that thing to which this form belongs. Moreover, it can understand itself only by means of an intelligible form that actually exists in itself." [Ita intellectus possibilis noster nihil potest intelligere antequam perficiatur forma intelligibili in actu: tunc enim intelligit rem cuius est illa forma; nec potest se intelligere nisi per formam intelligibilem actu in se existentem.] In this text "form" stands for the content of intellectual knowing: in its intelligible mode of being ("*in actu*") and in its real being ("*rem cuius est illa forma*"). What perfects the potency is the form of the sensible thing in an intelligible mode of being.

they may excel them in mode of being because their [being] is immaterial."[605] As already shown, every intellectual content comes from experience, including the first principles and first notions: "… from which it follows that the principle of cognition of the aforementioned principles is in the senses and the memory, as the Philosopher demonstrates towards the end of *Posteriorum*…"[606] (my trans.)

2.2.c. A Metaphysical A Priori

The following texts confirm our interpretation of the *Summa* with similar or more clear statements from other works of Aquinas. The focus now is on the characterization of the agent intellect as productive of an intelligible mode of being of the universal content.

> But the action of the agent intellect does not make intelligible those things which are of themselves intelligible, such as the essences of the angels, but things which of

[605] *De Ver.* 8, 10 ad 3 in Lambert, 98: "Sed formae intellectus nostri accipiuntur ex rebus; unde non sunt superexcedentes rebus sed quasi adequatae quantum ad repraesentationem, licet sint excedentes quantum ad modum essendi in quantum habent esse immateriale." Regarding the content, the same idea of "adequacy" between the thing and the mind can be seen in the following passage, *In Met.* 10, lect. 2, 1957: "Therefore [science and sense] are called measures figuratively, because in reality they are measured rather than measure. For it is not because we perceive or know a thing that it is so in reality; but it is because it is so in reality that we have a true knowledge or perception of it, as is said in Book IX […] Thus it follows that in perceiving and knowing something we measure our knowledge by means of the things which exist outside the mind." [Sic igitur per hanc similitudinem dicuntur mensurae, quia secundum rei veritatem magis mensurantur quam mensurent. Non enim quia nos aliquid sentimus aut scimus, ideo sic est in rerum natura. Sed quia sic est in rerum natura, ideo vero aliquid scimus, aut sentimus, ut dicitur nono *Metaphysicorum*. Et sic accidit nobis, quod in sentiendo et sciendo mensuramur per res quae extra nos sunt.] The notion of "measure" also implies a certain formal identity and in both passages the role of pattern is fulfilled by the forms in the things themselves.

[606] *In Boet. De Trin*. 6, 4, c.: "… unde principium cognitionis praedictorum principiorum est ex sensu et memoria, ut patet per Philosophum in fine *Posteriorum*…" Cf. *Q.D. De Anima*, a.5, c.: "Indeed, some men thought that the agent intellect does not differ from our habitus of indemonstrable principles. But this cannot be the case, because we certainly know indemonstrable principles by abstracting them from singulars, as the Philosopher teaches in the Posterior Analytics." [Quidam vero crediderunt intellectum agentem non esse aliud quam habitum principiorum indemonstrabilium in nobis. Sed hoc esse non potest, quia etiam ipsa principia indemonstrabilia cognoscimus abstrahendo a singularibus, ut docet philosophus in *I Poster*..]

> themselves are potentially intelligible, such as the essence of material things, which are received through sense and imagination…[607]

If St. Thomas' reference to "essences" is taken as a reference to the content, and their subsistence as either intelligible in act or in potency as a reference to their mode of being, then in this text the agent intellect is to be interpreted as a metaphysical a priori, insofar as it produces the intelligible mode of being of the essence of the material thing.

The following passage may be confusing if "formal" and "material" are not properly understood: "The intelligible species has that which is formal in it, through which it is actually intelligible, from the agent intellect, which is a higher power than the possible intellect, although that which is material in it is abstracted from phantasms."[608] "What is material" should be understood as the universal content of the intelligible species, since it is "abstracted" from the phantasm. What is formal in the species is its immaterial (and so "superior") mode of being, and this is what the species receives from the agent intellect.[609]

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[607] *De Ver*. 18, 5, c. in Sellés, *EIA*, 247: "Actione autem intellectus agentis non *fiunt intelligibilia* ea quae sunt de seipsis intelligibilia, cuiusmodi sunt *essentiae* angelorum, sed ea quae sunt de seipsis in potentia intelligibilia, qualia sunt *essentiae* rerum materialium, quae per sensum et imaginationem capiuntur…"

[608] *De Ver*. 18, 8, ad 3 in Sellés, *EIA*, 248: "Species intelligibilis id quod in ea formale est, per quod est intelligibilis actu, habet ab intellectu agente, qui est potentia superior intellectu possibili; quamvis id quod in ea materiale est, a phantasmatibus abstrahatur." The whole response revisits other points referred to previously, and confirms even more our reading.

[609] Cf. *De Ver* 20, 2 ad 5: "For the agent intellect needs no habit for its activity, because it does not receive anything from intelligible things, but gives its own form to them by making them actually intelligible. The possible intellect, however, has just the opposite relation to intelligible things." [Quod enim intellectus agens habitu non indigeat ad suam operationem, ex hoc contingit quod intellectus agens nihil recipit ab intelligibilibus, sed magis *formam suam eis tribuit*, faciendo ea intelligibilia actu; intellectus autem possibilis e contrario se habet.]

The following passages come from the *Contra Gentiles*. The agent intellect is the cause of the immaterial condition (= mode of being) of the species, which enables the intelligible species to represent the universal (= content):

> The intellect's understanding of the generic or specific nature apart from the individuating principles is due to the condition of the intelligible species received into it, for the species is immaterialized by the agent intellect through being abstracted from matter and material conditions whereby a particular thing is individuated. Consequently, the sensitive powers are unable to know universals; they cannot receive an immaterial form, since whatever is received by them is always received in a corporeal organ.[610]

The following text is one of the most explicit regarding the agent intellect as a metaphysical a priori:

> That which exists in the soul, however, differs from what is found in natural agents. For in the latter, one thing is in potentiality to something according to the same manner of being as that of its actual presence in something else; the matter of air is in potentiality to the form of water in the same way as it is in water. That is why natural bodies, which have matter in common, are mutually active and passive in the same order. On the other hand, the intellective soul is not in potentiality to the [species] of things in the phantasms, according to the mode of their presence therein, but according as they are raised to a higher level by abstraction from material individuating conditions, thus being made actually intelligible. The action of

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[610] *CG II*, 75, par. 8: "Quod autem intelligat intellectus naturam generis vel speciei denudatam a principiis individuantibus, contingit *ex conditione speciei intelligibilis* in ipso receptae, quae est *immaterialis effecta per intellectum agentem*, utpote abstracta a materia et conditionibus materiae, quibus aliquid individuatur. Et ideo potentiae sensitivae non possunt cognoscere universalia: quia non possunt recipere formam immaterialem, cum recipiant semper in organo corporali." Cf. *CG II*, 76, par. 3: "The purpose for which the agent intellect renders the species actually intelligible is not that they may serve as means of understanding on its part, especially as a separate substance, because the agent intellect is not in a state of potentiality; this purpose, on the contrary, is that the possible intellect may understand by those species which the agent intellect has made actually intelligible. Thus, the function of the agent intellect in regard to the intelligible species is simply to render them fit vehicles for the possible intellect's understanding. Now, the agent intellect makes them to be such as it is itself; for every agent produces its like." [Intellectus agens non facit species intelligibiles actu ut ipse per eas intelligat, maxime sicut substantia separata, cum non sit in potentia: sed ut per eas intelligat intellectus possibilis. Non igitur facit eas nisi *tales* quales competunt intellectui possibili ad intelligendum. *Tales autem facit eas qualis est ipse: nam omne agens agit sibi simile*.]

> the agent intellect on the phantasm, therefore, precedes the reception by the possible intellect, so that operational primacy here is ascribed not to the phantasms, but to the agent intellect. And for this reason Aristotle says that the agent intellect is related to the possible intellect as art to its matter.[611]

The possible intellect is in potency of these "*similitudines rerum quae sunt in phantasmatibus*" but not with the mode of being they have in the phantasms: "similitudines" should here be translated as "species" rather than as "representation", because "species" better indicates the *content* insofar as it is represented. In that way, this represented *content* belongs to the thing itself in one mode of being, but it is not received by the possible intellect with that same mode of being. In any case, it is clear that the agent intellect is responsible for the abstracted mode of being of something that is present in the phantasm with a different mode of being. Moreover, the fact that this action of the agent intellect *precedes* the reception by the possible intellect makes the agent intellect a metaphysical condition of possibility of the act of understanding.

There is another very explicit text in the commentary to the *De Anima*:

> And from this point of view the agent intellect is not in act. For if the agent intellect as such included the definite forms of all intelligible objects, the potential intellect would not depend upon phantasms; it would be actualised simply and solely by the agent intellect; and the latter's relation to intelligible objects would not be that of a maker to something made, as the Philosopher here says; for it would simply be identical with them. What makes it therefore in act with respect to intelligible

[611] *CG II*, 77, par. 3: "Differt tamen hoc quod invenitur in anima, ab eo quod invenitur in agentibus naturalibus. Quia ibi unum est in potentia ad aliquid *secundum eundem modum* quo in altero actu invenitur: nam materia aeris est in potentia ad formam aquae eo modo quo est in aqua. Et ideo corpora naturalia, quae communicant in materia, eodem ordine agunt et patiuntur ad invicem. Anima autem intellectiva non est in potentia ad similitudines rerum quae sunt in phantasmatibus *per modum illum* quo sunt ibi: sed secundum quod illae similitudines *elevantur ad aliquid altius, ut scilicet sint abstractae a conditionibus individuantibus materialibus, ex quo fiunt intelligibiles actu*. Et ideo actio intellectus agentis in phantasmate *praecedit* receptionem intellectus possibilis. Et sic principalitas actionis non attribuitur phantasmatibus, sed intellectui agenti. Propter quod Aristoteles dicit quod se habet ad possibilem sicut ars ad materiam."

> objects is the fact that it is an active immaterial force able to assimilate other things to itself, i.e.. to immaterialise them. In this way it renders the potentially intelligible actually so (like light which, without containing particular colours, actually brings colours into act).[612]

The text denies that the agent intellect is active regarding the content (Aquinas says previously that the possible intellect is in potency precisely in that regard), and affirms instead that its activity is a *certain* metaphysical causality, a "faciens sibi simile", a participation of its own mode of being (immaterial) to the intelligible in potency. The example of light is used to underline the fact that the agent intellect does not produce the content, even if it produces the intelligible in act. Also, the word "intelligible" seems to be used in both the sense of content ("*determinationum omnium intelligibilium*" is exactly what the agent intellect does not have, and therefore what the agent intellect cannot produce) and in the sense of mode of being ("alia *sibi similia* facere, scilicet immaterialia […] facit *intelligibilia* actu"). The two senses are distinguished, in order to avoid confusion: the agent intellect activates intelligibility in one sense, but not in the other sense (the content comes from the phantasms).[613] Finally, it would be a mistake simply to consider the agent

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[612] *In III De Anima* 4, 147-162: "Quantum autem ad hoc, intellectus agens non est in actu: si enim intellectus agens haberet in se determinationem omnium intelligibilium, non indigeret intellectus possibilis fantasmatibus, sed per solum intellectum agentem reduceretur in actum omnium intelligibilium; et sic non compararetur ad intelligibilia ut faciens ad factum, ut Philosophus hic dicit, sed ut existens ipsa intelligibilia. Comparatur igitur ut actus respectu intelligibilium, inquantum est quaedam virtus immaterialis activa potens alia sibi similia facere, scilicet immaterialia, et per hunc modum, ea quae sunt intelligibilia in potencia, facit intelligibilia actu: sic enim et lumen facit colores in actu, non quod ipsum habeat in se determinationem omnium colorum."

[613] Cf. *Q.D. De Anima*, a. 5, c.: "Therefore potentiality with respect to phantasms must be found within our soul so far as these phantasms are representative of determinate things. This belongs to the possible intellect which is, by its very nature, in potency to all intelligible objects, but is actuated by [*determinatur ad*] this or that object through species abstracted from phantasms. Our soul must also possess some active immaterial power which abstracts the phantasms themselves

intellect as a natural-real efficient cause and nothing else, even if the text may give that impression. This "making immaterial" is not *simply* the natural bestowing of a power, nor the physical communication of a perfection, but precisely the abstraction of the content from the phantasm.[614]

It is in this sense that the following text of the *Q.D. De Anima* orients us: "The intellect gives universality to the forms known inasmuch as it abstracts them from material individuating conditions. Consequently it is not necessary that the intellect be universal, but that it be immaterial."[615] "To give universality" in this text means the same as "to make intelligible" in other texts. St. Thomas is responding to an objection that portrays very simply the problem of the universals:

> A universal form does not acquire its universality from the thing existing outside the soul, because all forms existing in such things are individuated. Thus, if the forms in the intellect are universal, they must acquire this universality from the intellective

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from material individuating conditions. This belongs to the agent intellect, so that it is, as it were, a power participated from the superior substance, God." [Est ergo in anima nostra invenire potentialitatem respectu phantasmatum, *secundum quod sunt repraesentativa determinatarum rerum*. Et hoc pertinet ad intellectum possibilem, qui, quantum est de se, est in potentia ad omnia intelligibilia; *sed determinatur ad hoc vel aliud per species a phantasmatibus abstractas*. Est etiam in anima invenire *quamdam virtutem activam immaterialem*, quae ipsa phantasmata a materialibus conditionibus abstrahit; et hoc pertinet ad intellectum agentem, ut intellectus agens sit quasi quaedam *virtus participata ex aliqua substantia superiori*, scilicet Deo.]

[614] Cf. *Q. De Anima*, a.6, ad 5 in Lambert, 88: "In like manner, the action of the agent intellect is not of the same mode as the action of natural forms, for the action of the agent intellect consists in abstracting forms from matter, whereas the action of natural agents consists in impressing forms on matter." [Et similiter actio intellectus agentis, non est eiusdem modi cum actione formarum naturalium. Nam actio intellectus agentis consistit in abstrahendo a materia, actio vero agentium naturalium in imprimendo formas in materia.]

[615] *Q.D. De Anima*, a.2 ad 6: "Intellectus dat formis intellectis universalitatem, in quantum abstrahit eas a principiis materialibus individuantibus; unde non oportet quod intellectus sit universalis, sed quod sit immaterialis."

> soul. Consequently the intellective soul is not an individuated form, and therefore is not united to the body so far as its [being] is concerned.[616]

The objector confuses universality with intelligibility as a mode of being. St. Thomas would grant that the universal cannot be intelligible in act as it is in the things themselves and so, if it is actually intelligible, this must be by the action of the soul. What he corrects is the sense in which the soul makes "universal" or intelligible in act, that is by making immaterial, by abstracting from matter what is in matter under individual conditions. As he says in other instances, what makes something intelligible in act is not the fact that it is universal (a content abstracted from individuals), but the fact that it is immaterial, which is a mode of being.[617] The agent intellect does not make the content, but the abstraction of the content; it makes "immaterial." Therefore, it does not need to be universal, but immaterial.[618]

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[616] *Q.D. De Anima*, a.2 ob. 6: "Forma universalis non habet quod sit intellectiva a re quae est extra animam; quia omnes formae quae sunt in rebus extra animam, sunt individuatae. Si igitur formae intellectus sint universales, oportet quod hoc habeant ab anima intellectiva. Non ergo anima intellectiva est forma individuata; et ita non unitur corpori secundum esse."

[617] Cf. *Q.D. De Anima*, a.2, ad 5: "The human soul is an individuated form and so also is its power which is called the possible intellect, as well as the intelligible forms which are received in the possible intellect. But this does not prevent these forms from being actually [understood], for a thing is actually [understood] because it is immaterial, not because it is universal. Indeed, the universal is intelligible because it is abstracted from material individuating conditions." [Anima humana est quaedam forma individuata; et similiter potentia eius quae dicitur intellectus possibilis, et formae intelligibiles in eo receptae. Sed hoc non prohibet eas esse intellectas in actu: ex hoc enim aliquid est intellectum in actu quod est immateriale, non autem ex hoc quod est universale; sed magis universale habet quod sit intelligibile per hoc quod est abstractum a principiis materialibus individuantibus.]

[618] Cf. *De Spirit. Creat.*, a.10, ad 6: "It must be said that this very fact that the light of the agent intellect is not an act of any corporeal organ through which it acts is sufficient for its being able to separate intelligible species from phantasms; since the separateness of intelligible species, which are received in the possible intellect, is not greater than the separateness of the agent intellect." [Hoc ipsum quod lumen intellectus agentis non est actus alicuius organi corporei per quod operetur, sufficit ad hoc quod possit separare species intelligibiles a phantasmatibus; cum separatio specierum intelligibilium quae recipiuntur in intellectu possibili, non sit maior quam separatio

2.3. The Comparison of the Agent Intellect with Light

The agent intellect is like a light. What does this mean for Aquinas? The first important text to keep in mind is 79, 3 ad 2. Aquinas is aware that the role of light in the sensible realm is subject to differing opinions, but he knows in what definite sense he is using it (as a metaphor) regarding intellectual knowing:

> There are two opinions as to the effect of light. For some say that light is required for sight, in order to make colors actually visible. And according to this the active intellect is required for understanding, in like manner and for the same reason as light is required for seeing. But in the opinion of others, light is required for sight[,] not for the colors to become actually visible; but in order that the medium may become actually luminous, as the Commentator says on *De Anima ii*. And according to this, Aristotle's comparison of the active intellect to light is verified in this, that as it is required for understanding, so is light required for seeing; but not for the same reason.[619]

That is to say, whatever opinion one may hold about the effect of light is of no consequence to Aquinas. The fact is, the agent intellect is required so that the nature of corporeal things is made intelligible in act. The metaphor is more helpful to us if we understand sensible light in the same way; the necessity and the role of the agent intellect, however, do not depend on the metaphor, but on the principles exposed in the corpus: because the possible intellect must be actualized by an intelligible in act, and the object of

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intellectus agentis.] St. Thomas' point is to show that the effect is proportionate to the cause, and all he says refers to the mode of being of the content, not to the content. The content, in fact, is not separate from the things themselves (cf. 85, 1 ad 1), but the abstracted species is.

[619] 79, 3 ad 2: "Circa effectum luminis est duplex opinio. Quidam enim dicunt quod lumen requiritur ad visum, ut faciat colores actu visibiles. Et secundum hoc, similiter requiritur, et propter idem, intellectus agens ad intelligendum, propter quod lumen ad videndum. Secundum alios vero, lumen requiritur ad videndum, non propter colores, ut fiant actu visibiles; sed ut medium fiat actu lucidum, ut Commentator dicit in *II De Anima*. Et secundum hoc, similitudo qua Aristoteles assimilat intellectum agentem lumini, attenditur quantum ad hoc, quod sicut hoc est necessarium ad videndum, ita illud ad intelligendum; sed non propter idem." Cf. *In II De Anima* 14, 356 ff.; *In III De Anima* 4, 43-53; *Q.D. De Anima*, a.4, ad 4 (see *Appendix*, Note 20).

understanding is not intelligible in act in its natural mode of being, there must be an agent power that makes it intelligible in act.[620]

A more obscure text is 85, 1 ad 4. What is interesting about this passage is that Aquinas speaks of two actions of the agent intellect: one he calls "illumination", an action of the agent intellect upon the phantasm, an action of which he does not speak anywhere else in the treatise; and the other he calls "abstraction," referring to the usual efficiency of the agent intellect as making the intelligible in act:

> Not only does the active intellect throw light on the phantasm: it does more; by its own power it abstracts the intelligible species from the phantasm. It throws light on the phantasm, because, just as the sensitive part acquires a greater power by its conjunction with the intellectual part, so by the power of the active intellect the phantasms are made […] fit for the abstraction therefrom of intelligible intentions. Furthermore, the active intellect abstracts the intelligible species from the phantasm, forasmuch as by the power of the active intellect we are able [to take into our consideration the specific nature without the conditions of individuality, since the image of that specific nature] informs the passive intellect.[621]

Notice Aquinas' freedom in his use of words but, at the same time, his precision in conveying what he means. The fact that he is now using "illumination" for something that is not abstraction does not mean that he cannot use "illumination" or "light" to signify the

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[620] Cory (cf. *Averroes*, 11-12) distinguishes basically two theories of light (L1 and L2). Averroes interprets the role of light as not actualizing the visible object itself (L1), but as making the medium able to receive the influence of the colour (L2). Averroes attributes this theory to Aristotle. About St. Thomas she says: "Although later in life he discarded the L1 Theory of physical light in favor of L2, he continued to insist that L1 provides the appropriate model for the agent intellect's abstractive function; see QDDA, 4, ad 4; ST, I, 79, 3, ad 2" (Cory, *Averroes*, 42).

[621] 85, 1 ad 4: "Phantasmata et illuminantur ab intellectu agente; et iterum ab eis, per virtutem intellectus agentis, species intelligibiles abstrahuntur. Illuminantur quidem, quia, sicut pars sensitiva ex coniunctione ad intellectivam efficitur virtuosior, ita phantasmata ex virtute intellectus agentis redduntur habilia ut ab eis intentiones intelligibiles abstrahantur. Abstrahit autem intellectus agens species intelligibiles a phantasmatibus, inquantum per virtutem intellectus agentis accipere possumus in nostra consideratione naturas specierum sine individualibus conditionibus, secundum quarum similitudines intellectus possibilis informatur."

agent intellect insofar as it abstracts.[622] But here there is a reason for using the word "illumination," and this is what is important.

Objection Four plays with the "material" meaning of the two words that are usually related to the action of the agent intellect: abstraction and light. Whereas light seems to be something active, in the sense of a certain influence on what is illuminated (we see the effect of the light on the object), the word abstraction, though active as well, seems rather to be a kind of "taking from" its object. Therefore, if the agent intellect "illuminates," it does not "take from."

The objection gives Aquinas the opportunity to round off his Epistemology. The issue is not a secondary one: is the phantasm intelligible in potency? It is easy to admit that something material is not intelligible in act, but this is not the same as saying that it is intelligible in potency. If the agent intellect makes the phantasm intelligible in act, it is because the phantasm is already intelligible in potency. Now, to be intelligible in potency is to "actually" possess a potentiality of becoming intelligible in act. Does the phantasm have this potentiality?

It would not be out of place initially to clarify in what sense the phantasm is said to be "intelligible in potency": it is in potency in the same sense that it will be in act, because we are talking about potency and act of the same thing. Therefore, if to be intelligible in act means—for the object of understanding—acquiring a new mode of being, this is also the

[622] This he does, for example, in 79, 3 ad 2 (quoted above) and 79, 4, c. Cf. *De Spirit. Creat*., a.10, ad 4: "… but yet it actually possesses an immaterial light which has the power of abstracting those things which are able to be abstracted in potency." [… sed tamen actu habet lumen immateriale habens virtutem abstrahendi quae sunt abstrahibilia in potential.]

kind of potentiality we are talking about. It is a potentiality that regards the *modus rei intellectae*, and not the object itself as such (*res intellecta*). In fact, the object as such is in act, not in potency: the nature of the corporeal thing is the specific perfection of the corporeal thing, that which makes it to be what it is, a formal perfection received in the matter and actualizing the matter.

We have said also that to possess the potentiality of becoming intelligible in act is not the same as not to be intelligible in act. An example may clarify the point. It may be said that, in a certain sense, a table is "in potency" of becoming a man. But if a table will become a man, first it must suffer the action of many agents before finally becoming something that is in proximate potency of becoming a man. In the realm of nature, not everything comes from every thing, but there is an order in the processes of things. A table is not a man (in act), but this does not simply imply that it is in potency of becoming a man.

In a similar way, if something in intellectual knowing comes from the object (the universal content in an intelligible mode of being), the object must be able to contribute to this effect, at least under the influence of an agent power.

Now the phantasm (which represents the object) as a material thing cannot produce more than natural effects (the first mode of being of *De Ver.* 2, 2). If an intentional effect (second mode of being) is to come from the phantasm, that ability cannot be produced by its natural principles because cause and effect must be proportionate. This is why Aquinas introduces the influence of the celestial bodies in order to explain sensible knowing. There

must be an intentional influence on the material things in order to explain how sensible knowing may come from them.[623]

Here, it appears that Aquinas is trying to explain how the intelligible species[624] may come from the phantasm under the abstractive influence (second action) of the agent intellect. The phantasm is made able, by a certain intentional causality of the agent intellect called here "illumination," to be *subject* to the agent intellect's abstractive activity, by which the phantasm's nature becomes intelligible in act. In other words, by this illumination, the phantasm is made intelligible in potency; whereas, by abstraction, the phantasm is made

[623] A notion of *claritas*, as a property of the natural form which functions as the condition of possibility of the form's perception (as proposed by Kevin E. O'Reilly, *Aesthetic Perception: A Thomistic Perspective* [Portland: Four Courts Press, 2007], 24ff.) would not replace, in my view, the Thomistic theory of the celestial bodies, although if it is understood in a certain sense, it could be taken as a complementary notion. O'Reilly understands *claritas* as an objective property that is actualized only by the actualization of subjectivity ("[aesthetic] *visio in actu est claritas in actu"*) and he relates his claim to the Aristotelian identity (i.e., *intellectus in actu est intellectum in actu*) interpreted as an identity between subject and object (an interpretation I consider foreign to Aquinas, as I have argued in *Chapter 3*). Now, if the principle of actualization of a content-property of the object is on the side of the subject, O'Reilly is proposing what I am rejecting, which is a formal a priori in perception, as formally constitutive of the object of knowing. In other words, if *claritas* is *what* is known by the aesthetic *visio*, and receives its actuality from *visio* itself, it means that it is only potentially in the form itself, and actual in the subject's activity. Understood in this sense, therefore, the notion of *claritas* cannot replace the Thomistic theory of celestial bodies because it begins from principles foreign to St. Thomas (in my interpretation). In other words, if we say that the object is not actual independently from the activity of the subject (cf. 25), but we do not distinguish the object from its mode of being, we are giving to the subject a responsibility over the content that the subject does not have in Aquinas. In my view, because in knowing there is always a distinction between the object in itself and in its knowable mode of being, a cause for that knowable mode of being is always needed, both at the level of sensible and intelligible knowing. Now, O'Reilly mentions that "clarity is […] a property of form, for all form participates in the divine clarity" (24). If we understand this property as a participation on God's knowability, a participation that, in the Thomistic system, could very well arrive at material things through the mediation of other creatures, then I do not see a tension with the Thomistic theory of celestial bodies, but I see, rather, the core of it. This knowability, in the intellectual realm, is related to what we have called the intelligible mode of being and, in our interpretation, the activity of the agent intellect is related to this mode of being.

[624] Intelligible species, i.e., the universal content in its intelligible mode of being.

intelligible in act. And, because both actions of the agent intellect regard the *modus rei intellectae*, it cannot be said that the intelligible content comes from any of these actions. Rather, the intelligible content (*res intellecta*) is able to be rendered intelligible (*modus r. i.)* by the action of the agent intellect.

Aquinas could have ascribed this type of causality to a separate substance, as he ascribed to the celestial bodies the intentional causality of the material things. But he did not want to multiply causes without necessity. There is already in the human being an active intellective power which is a participation of the divine light and so, for Aquinas, this power is the cause of this potentiality in the phantasm.[625]

The action of light is sometimes related to the verb *resultare* as opposed to *transmutatio*: "The emanation of proper accidents from their subject is not by way of transmutation, but by a certain natural resultance; thus one thing results naturally from another, as color from light."[626] The action of light does not produce the colours (as in a *transmutatio* where one thing causes the other) but, rather, makes the colours visible. In the following text, *resultare* is again opposed to *transmutatio*: "As the power of the soul flows from the essence, not by a transmutation, but by a certain natural resultance, and is simultaneous with the soul, so is it the case with one power as regards another."[627]

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[625] Cromp (cf. 188) does not seem to consider this distinction relevant in the text of Aquinas.

[626] 77, 6 ad 3: "Emanatio propriorum accidentium a subiecto non est per aliquam transmutationem; sed per aliquam naturalem resultationem, sicut ex uno naturaliter aliud resultat, ut ex luce color."

[627] 77, 7 ad 1: "Sicut potentia animae ab essentia fluit, non per transmutationem, sed per naturalem quandam resultationem, et est simul cum anima; ita est etiam de una potentia respectu alterius."

Resultare is a way of "being-originated," different from physical alteration and not implying time of itself. St. Thomas uses *resultare* for the agent intellect in the following text:

> This is done by the power of the active intellect which by turning towards the phantasm produces in the passive intellect a certain likeness which represents, as to its specific conditions only, the thing reflected in the phantasm. It is thus that the intelligible species is said to be abstracted from the phantasm…[628]

We may say that this is one of the texts in which Aquinas seems to speak of abstraction as an "illumination." But what is clear is that, by using "*resultat*," he is suggesting that the action of the agent intellect is not productive of the object, but lets the object be seen. The metaphor of light and the use of *resultare* seem also to discourage an understanding of the agent intellect as a formal a priori.

The metaphor of light is used clearly for the agent intellect in some texts (cf. 84, 5, c.; 88, 3 ad 1). But this does not prevent St. Thomas from using it to signify the separate intellects (especially the divine intellect). The intellectual light in God is simple, but the more distant from its first source, the more divided will we find this light:

> Every intellectual substance possesses intellective power by the influence of the Divine light, which is one and simple in its first principle, and the farther off intellectual creatures are from the first principle so much the more is the light divided and diversified, as is the case with lines radiating from the centre of a circle.[629]

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[628] 85, 1 ad 3: "Sed virtute intellectus agentis resultat quaedam similitudo in intellectu possibili ex conversione intellectus agentis supra phantasmata, quae quidem est repraesentativa eorum quorum sunt phantasmata, solum quantum ad naturam speciei. Et per hunc modum dicitur abstrahi species intelligibilis a phantasmatibus…"

[629] 89, 1, c.: "In omnibus enim substantiis intellectualibus invenitur virtus intellectiva per influentiam divini luminis. Quod quidem in primo principio est unum et simplex; et quanto magis creaturae intellectuales distant a primo principio, tanto magis dividitur illud lumen et diversificatur, sicut accidit in lineis a centro egredientibus."

The divine intelligence is also called "light" in relationship to the knowledge of the separate soul, when there is no abstraction: "But the soul when separated understands singulars by species derived from the Divine light, which is indifferent to what is near or distant. Hence knowledge in the separated soul is not hindered by local distance."[630] The divine intelligence is called light because it makes possible the act of understanding, not insofar as it physically moves the faculty to understand, but insofar as it bestows an agent object, the intelligible in act. It is what the agent intellect does in this life, insofar as it produces the agent object, the intelligible in act, by means of abstraction from the phantasm. The difference is that God does not make intelligible something that is not (i.e., in its mode of being), but makes *the* intelligible itself (the intelligible species with its content) as a participation of its own truth. God certainly makes the object visible, not though as the object is in itself, but as it is in God Himself. That is why the content of the infused species is "intensive" and not proportionate to the human intellect.

There are, as it were, three intelligibilities: intelligible power, intelligible object and intelligible mode of being of the object (the separation from matter that allows it to be understood). In God, the three things are one and the same. In the angel, the proportionate object is already in an intelligible mode of being. In human beings, this is not the case; here, the object is not "light" (intelligibility as mode of being) but needs to be "illumined." This is the need for and the nature of the agent intellect.

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[630] 89, 7, c.: "Intelligit autem anima separata singularia per influxum specierum ex divino lumine, quod quidem lumen aequaliter se habet ad propinquum et distans. Unde distantia localis nullo modo impedit animae separatae cognitionem."

A text from the *Contra Gentiles*[631] can serve as a summary of many of the concepts that form the core of our argument. For Aquinas, it is not difficult to see how an agent intellect and a possible intellect may coexist in one soul:

> For nothing prevents one thing from being in one respect potential in relation to some other thing, and actual in another respect, as we observe in things of nature; air is actually damp and potentially dry, and the reverse is true of earth. Now, this same interrelationship obtains between the intellective soul and the phantasms.[632]

That is to say, the phantasm is in act of something of which the soul is potency, and the soul is in act of something *different* of which the phantasm is potency: "For the intellective soul has something actual to which the phantasm is potential, and is potential to something present actually in the phantasm."[633] What are these different things? Aquinas begins by examining the actuality and the potentiality with regards to the soul:

> "[S]ince the substance of the human soul is possessed of immateriality, and, as is clear from what has been said, it therefore has an intellectual nature—every immaterial substance being of this kind. But this does not mean that the soul is now [determinately] likened to this or that thing, as it must be in order to know this or that thing determinately; for all knowledge is brought about by the likeness of the thing known being present in the knower. Thus, the intellectual soul itself remains potential with respect to the determinate likenesses of things that can be known by us, namely, the natures of sensible things. It is the phantasms which present these determinate natures [of sensible things] to us .[634]

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[631] *II*, 77, par. 2; Cf. 79, 4 ad 4.

[632] *CG II*, 77, par. 2: "Nihil enim prohibet hoc respectu illius esse secundum quid in potentia et secundum aliud in actu, sicut in rebus naturalibus videmus: aer enim est actu humidus et potentia siccus, terra autem e converso. Haec autem comparatio invenitur esse inter animam intellectivam et phantasmata."

[633] *CG II*, 77, par. 2: "Habet enim anima intellectiva aliquid in actu ad quod phantasma est in potentia: et ad aliquid est in potentia quod in phantasmatibus actu invenitur."

[634] *CG II*, 77, par. 2: "Habet enim substantia animae humanae *immaterialitatem*, et, sicut ex dictis patet, ex hoc habet naturam intellectualem: quia omnis substantia immaterialis est huiusmodi. Ex hoc autem nondum habet quod assimiletur huic vel illi rei determinate, quod requiritur ad hoc quod anima nostra hanc vel illam rem determinate cognoscat: omnis enim cognitio fit secundum similitudinem cogniti in cognoscente. Remanet igitur ipsa anima intellectiva in potentia ad

The soul is in act of being immaterial (it possesses immateriality), but is in potency of determinate species of its object. Species is here the *content* as *represented*, and not simply the species as a means; this is because the species as a means is act in the same sense as the soul is act (immateriality), and here Aquinas is trying to show that potentiality and actuality are referred to different things. The soul is in potency of something which *will perfect it* in a way different from the way in which the soul *is already perfect*. The soul is in potency of receiving the perfection of the thing, not of being immaterial; but the determinate species of the thing (here, the phantasm), though it *possesses* the perfection of the thing, is in potency of being immaterial, as Aquinas says:

> But these phantasms have not yet acquired intelligible actuality, since they are likenesses of sensible things even as to material conditions, which are the individual properties, and, moreover, the phantasms exist in material organs. Consequently, they are not actually intelligible. They are, however, potentially intelligible, since in the individual man whose likeness the phantasms reflect it is possible to [conceive] the universal nature stripped of all individuating conditions. And so, the phantasms have intelligibility potentially, while being actually determinate as likenesses of things. In the intellective soul the opposite was the case.[635]

In what better way could Aquinas have said that the content of which the soul is in potency is in act in some sense, and yet is in potency in another sense (which is exactly the point of the paragraph)? The word "*determinatio*" seems to be a means to express this

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determinatas similitudines rerum cognoscibilium a nobis, quae sunt naturae rerum sensibilium. Et has quidem determinatas naturas rerum sensibilium praesentant nobis phantasmata." Cf. *Q.D. De Anima*, a.5, ob. 6 et ad 6.

[635] *CG II*, 77, par. 2: "Quae [i.e. phantasmata] tamen nondum pervenerunt ad esse intelligibile: cum sint similitudines rerum sensibilium *etiam* secundum conditiones materiales, quae sunt proprietates individuales, et sunt etiam in organis materialibus. Non igitur sunt intelligibilia actu. Et tamen, quia *in hoc homine* cuius similitudinem repraesentant phantasmata, est accipere naturam universalem *denudatam ab omnibus conditionibus individuantibus*, sunt intelligibilia in potentia. Sic igitur habent intelligibilitatem in potentia, *determinationem autem similitudinis rerum in actu*. E contrario autem erat in anima intellectiva."

"potential actuality" or "actual potentiality" of the nature in the concrete substance. Aquinas' point cannot be simply that the phantasm is in act of representing the thing in its particularity. This is because the soul is not in potency of that actuality, but in potency of the universal nature which is *actually* present in the thing itself (as is most clear in the passage just quoted),[636] but not in the mode of being which will make it knowable. That is why the agent intellect and the possible intellect are not only distinct faculties in the same soul, insofar as their activites regard different potentialities (as is evident in the conclusion of the paragraph), but the work of one requires the work of the other as a condition of possibility. Aquinas concludes: "Hence, there is in that soul an active power vis-à-vis the phantasms, making them actually intelligible; and this power is called the agent intellect; while there is also in the soul a power that is in potentiality to the determinate likenesses of sensible things; and this power is the possible intellect."[637] These "*determinatas similitudines rerum sensibilium*" are not the phantasms, but the abstracted species insofar as they represent the sensible things in their nature. And "*faciens ea intelligibilia actu*" implies the immaterialization of the universal nature, and so the contribution of a mode of being ("*denudatam*") to it.

[636] Note in particular how the phantasms are said to be "similitudines rerum sensibilium *etiam* secundum conditiones materiales." This implies that the nature is also in some way represented in the phantasm. This is not surprising if we admit that, for Aquinas, the nature is present in the particular thing: if the universal nature can be present in the particular thing, it can also be present in the representation of that particular thing, in some way. That is why Aquinas says that "Whatever is in our intellect must have previously been in the senses." [Oportet ut quod est in intellectu nostro, prius in sensu fuerit.] (*De Ver* 2, 3, ad 19).

[637] *CG II*, 77, par. 2: "Est igitur in anima intellectiva virtus activa in phantasmata, faciens ea intelligibilia actu: et haec potentia animae vocatur intellectus agens. Est etiam in ea virtus quae est in potentia ad determinatas similitudines rerum sensibilium: et haec est potentia intellectus possibilis."

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With this ends the explanation of the texts supporting the proposed interpretation of the agent intellect in St. Thomas as a metaphysical a priori. As can be seen, this explanation depends heavily on the previous reflections. If we distinguish, with Aquinas, between intelligible as *res intellecta* and as *modus rei intellectae* (*Chapter 2*) and we then understand the passivity of human understanding as a reception of the intelligible as content (*Chapter 3*), it becomes possible to understand the efficiency of the agent intellect as relating to the mode of being of the content and, therefore, to understand the agent intellect as a metaphysical a priori.

Conclusion

We conclude this dissertation by offering a brief summary of the topic, the main contributions, limits and future lines of research.

1. Summary

Focusing on the treatise on human being in the *Summa Theologiae*, I have substantiated my interpretation of Aquinas' agent intellect as a metaphysical a priori. The mention of a metaphysical a priori refers by contrast to a formal a priori, a crucial notion in Modern Philosophy.

In Aquinas, the meaning of things (their nature or intelligibility) is not determined by the agent intellect, but resides in the things themselves. The agent intellect gives the common nature an intelligible mode of being, so that the specific perfection of things may become somehow the perfection of our intelligence. Intelligence (i.e., the possible intellect) receives the perfection-content of things; it is in this sense that the possible intellect is in potency before knowing. The perfection-content receives an intelligible mode of being; it is in that sense that the agent intellect perfects the object of knowing. The agent intellect gives to the specific natures of sensible things the ability to act as agent objects; the agent intellect does not provide their content. The agent intellect is thus, for Aquinas, not a formal but a metaphysical a priori of human understanding. A Kantian formal a priori, instead, is source of intelligible content and constitutive of the known.

By making Aquinas dialogue with Kant, I have intended to point out the radical difference between the two systems, thereby highlighting the difficulties of understanding

Aquinas' agent intellect as a formal a priori. This was required for my interpretation *of Aquinas* in order to distinguish it clearly from other interpretations that may consider the agent intellect as fulfilling the role of a Kantian transcendental. That is why I thought it important to bring forth the tension between Aquinas and Kant, and to take that tension to its root: the differing Kantian and Thomistic "facts," which work as their respective points of departure and require, as conditions of possibility, their respective a priori elements.

The dialogue with Kant was also helpful in connecting Aquinas' thought with meaningful reflection for today since, despite their differing approaches, I suggest seeing both thinkers (Kant and St. Thomas) as facing the same question: the tension between content of experience and universal knowing. This is my reason for having placed the doctrine of the agent intellect in its natural context, the problem of the universals.

It should be clear that my point was not so much to offer an overall interpretation of Kant (about whose contributions future conversations ought to happen), as it was to try to "catch" Kant's approach to the problem of the universals at the very beginning and to show, thus, the tension with St. Thomas's approach. This approach, in my view, is Kant's legacy to Modern Philosophy, and it is precisely here that the relevant distinction between Aquinas and Kant is located, particularly in reference to Aquinas' doctrine of the agent intellect.

2. Contributions

My main contribution, rather than being the particular characterization of the agent intellect (a view that can actually be found in other authors as well) is, instead, the argument produced to support this characterization. This argument is related to the particular connection among the first three chapters, explained several times in the

dissertation. *Chapter 1* establishes the fact which requires for Aquinas an agent intellect, and it gives us two very important principles: one is the object of human understanding (the universal nature) as present in the things themselves, and the other that it is not in the things themselves with a mode of being that makes it available to the intellectual eye. These two principles lead us to the main point of *Chapter 2*, namely the distinction between the intelligible object and its intelligible mode of being. Now, because knowing is receptive of the intelligible object (*Chapter 3*), which is present in the things themselves (*Chapter 1*), the agent intellect is active, not of the intelligible content, but of its abstracted or intelligible mode of being (*Chapter 4*).

Another contribution is showing the connection between the interpretation of the Aristotelian identity in Aquinas (cf. *Chapter 3*) and the distinction between *res intellecta* and *modus rei intellectae* (*Chapter 2*). The not unusual misunderstanding of the Aristotelian identity in Aquinas (as if it were an identity between subject and object) is related to the lack of distinction between the aforementioned two meanings of intelligible. It is an important point, in my view, because some authors may stumble in this misunderstanding of the Aristotelian identity in Aquinas and then think that for Aquinas, as for Kant, the *content*-perfection of the known is the act of the knower. What I propose is that the objective aspect of the Aristotelian identity (*intellectum in actu*) cannot be taken as *simply* the content, but that it actually refers to the *representation* of the content, and so to the content, yes, but *in its cognitive mode of being*.

3. Limits and Future Lines of Research

Some of the limitations of this dissertation have to do with its methodology, and have already been mentioned in the *Introduction*, or in the previous points of this conclusion.

On another note, it is always challenging to express one's own view to scholars who come from different interpretations and/or philosophical backgrounds. One of the ways I thought important to overcome this difficulty was to focus not so much on the definition of terms, as on the definition of the problems and the approaches.

On the one hand, the specificity of a topic can make it difficult to find relevant scholarly work addressing the issue as directly as needed. On the other hand, many more general works on Aquinas' Epistemology and other more particular studies treat many of the points I have made in dealing with my precise topic, and they have not been expressly referenced. I have softened this silence by engaging a few more relevant authors, but I look forward to engaging other views, particularly in Transcendental Thomism.

In the main, this investigation has allowed me to better work out my own position and, I hope, has made it understandable; further engagement in a broader and constructive dialogue could certainly foster a better understanding of Aquinas. In particular, my silence regarding interpretations of Aquinas in Transcendental Thomism is due mainly to the impossibility of adequately engaging in the interpretation of several authors at the same time. My interpretation of St. Thomas could be taken as preparation for establishing a more fruitful engagement with this particular school.

A detailed study of the rest of the *Summa*, with regards to the outcomes of this dissertation, could prove of the greatest relevance for assessing my interpretation on several points, particularly the treatise on the Trinity (for example, the notion of *verbum*), the references to other "lights" in intellectual knowing (such as the *lumen gloriae* and faith), other explicit references to the agent intellect, the human knowledge of Christ, and a long *et cetera*. Not to mention the study of those same topics in the rest of Aquinas' works. These findings could also help us to read such texts in a new light.

For example, in the text in the *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 34, a.1 ad 3, the distinction between *res intellecta* and *modus rei intellectae*, and the consequent distinction between species and object, may help us to better understand the distinction between the two aspects of the *Verbum* in the Holy Trinity: one aspect according to which the *Verbum* is absolutely the same as regards the whole Trinity (the whole Trinity is said through the *Verbum*, the whole Trinity is understood by the Three Divine Persons in the one *Verbum*) and another aspect in which the *Verbum* is distinct (only one *Verbum* is said by the one Father). What is understood is not only the Species, but the whole Trinity in the Species because, for St. Thomas, species and object are two different notions. In the case of the Trinity, there is actually an absolute complete identity between *intellectus* and *intellectum* (= object), but not between *intellectum* and *Verbum* (insofar as the *Verbum* and *also* the other persons of the Trinity and other creatures are what is understood).

The *Verbum* in the Trinity would be that which we have called *species expressa* as regards human understanding—that is, the subjective modification of the human intellect as the intellect's reference to that which is understood. The *species impressa* is God

Himself, already intelligible in act, and the content of this species is simply the divine essence. There is an absolute identity between intellect and thing understood, because God is pure intellect and understands Himself by Himself (by Himself as *species impressa*: God is intelligible by Himself; He does not need an agent intellect). But He understands Himself by means of a *Verbum* as *species expressa*, which proceeds from the Father and whose content is the whole Divinity.

Now if, as we have suggested, the act of the human intellect (as *verbum*) proceeds from the intellect itself (as faculty in potency) by the agency of an intelligible in act (the *species impressa*), it is more clear how the notion of *verbum* is most fitting to speak of distinction in the Trinity: the notion of *verbum*, in fact, contains procession of origin (which in the Trinity is the only way to distinctions) and allows identity of substance (insofar as the *verbum*'s content can be the very self, in those who do not have matter and are already intelligible in act, and insofar as the *verbum* has no other being than the being of the intellect itself).[638]

It would be interesting to study the relationship of the supernatural lights to the agent intellect. In fact, faith does not seem to make intelligible ("visible") its proper object: faith makes us *judge* about things which are not evident. The metaphor of light, then, acquires a new significance, as *that which allows us to judge with certainty* about something. A study of the function of the agent intellect in human judgment and of the possibility of referring to certain "objects" of knowing—such as the first principles—as

[638] This latter is that which we have considered the Thomistic interpretation of the Aristotelian identity, *intellectus in actu est intellectum in actu*.

"light" becomes necessary. Moreover, the "light" metaphor may also suffer adjustments in its use for the *lumen gloriae*, since this light does not affect so much the object (the Divine Essence) as the human subject itself. It is light, it seems, as *that which allows us to see*, not though as affecting the object (as in intellectual human knowing) nor the *medium* (as in sensible vision) but, rather, as affecting the potency itself.

Regarding the human knowledge of Christ, our findings can help us better understand how, for St. Thomas, there can be in Christ a distinct knowing of everything from His conception and, at the same time, a progression in His knowing. The divine essence and the infused species are "intelligibles" in act which as such are agent objects, respectively, of Christ's science of vision and infused science. Science is here the particular reference of His possible intellect to the objects by the agency of an intelligible in act and, therefore, a reference to the object represented *in* the species, to the object *through* the species (*impressa*). The aforementioned species are in Jesus since the moment of His conception, but not so the *species impressae* resulting from the action of the agent intellect on the phantasms. These latter species provoke a *new* reference of the possible intellect (because, even if a species regards an object that Jesus already knows with another science, the species itself, in its subjective mode of being, is different—as a numerically different *species impressa*), and therefore there is a new science (acquired knowledge), which is progressive due to the temporal succession of experience and the consequent succession of new phantasms, *species impressae* and *expressae*. It really seems as if the distinction of *species impressa* and *expressa*, though not explicit in Aquinas, is very helpful in understanding what he means here. But these species should be understood, I believe, not

as two different images, but as two different moments of the same content, as available initially and as "embraced" later. The *species expressa* is thus a reference to the *impressa* in its content (or: to the content of the *impressa*), a reference "produced" by the presence of the *impressa* to the faculty.

The significance of the questions of knowing and being in Theology can never be overemphasized, at least from a Thomistic point of view. From the first article of the *Summa*, Aquinas distinguishes between what can be known by the light of reason and what is beyond its reach. Human being has been given an end which surpasses the light of reason and, therefore, a different knowledge must be added to the one obtained by purely natural means. In other words, the different kind of being of the object requires a different kind of knowing: this is the reason for a Sacred Doctrine. Finite reason can know finite being, and can realize that there is an infinite being which is the cause. Finite reason can "see" that there must be an infinite being, can "see" that infinite being is not like other beings, but cannot see this infinite being—and finite reason remains outside the castle—hoping that someone will lower the drawbridge towards happiness. However, it is always the same human being who is called to enter the castle and, therefore, human natural powers are not left outside, but invited in, where a new light—the light of the castle—will allow human intelligence to see the King. This notion of knowing as encounter may prove very helpful in understanding Aquinas' approach to both philosophical and theological questions.

One question that could be addressed further is the more precise understanding of the action of the agent intellect. In fact, my characterization of the agent intellect as an a priori which is *metaphysical* could have given the impression that the agent intellect

produces the intelligible mode of being as "bestowing" or "adding" something physical to the object. Although, in Aquinas, it does seem that the agent intellect bestows something real on the phantasm itself (the "first action" of the agent intellect in 85,1 ad 4), the abstractive (second) action properly speaking seems, rather, to be an "extraction" of the content. In other words, it seems that the action of the agent intellect should be understood more as a "dematerialization" (efficient in taking from) than as a "spiritualization" (efficient in providing perfection), although both are correct in a sense. On the one hand, I think it is more a dematerialization because the spirituality of the content is nothing other than its being separated from its individual conditions in the matter. On the other hand, it can still be said to be a "spiritualization" because the content in its state of abstraction "subsists" spiritually, participating in some way the mode of being of the agent intellect.

What is most important, however, is to understand the methodological problem; that is, although we do need material "parables" to understand our capacity for understanding, we must transcend them; and the action of the agent intellect is one of those instances in which the use of images and even words seems to disappoint us the most. This "making intelligible" seems to be a certain "letting [a content] be seen" by the separation of the content from its individual conditions in the matter. Now, this separation is not physical, because content and individual conditions are not physically separated in the sensible thing. The separation comes about by an elevation of that content to a different mode of being. That different mode of being must be present in the potentiality of

the phantasm, and this is why St. Thomas makes a distinction between the two actions of the agent intellect.

My focus on the simple apprehension allowed me to say very little about judgment. An explicit consideration of judgment in Aquinas in connection with my reflections on the role of the agent intellect could prove very fruitful in order to refine our findings and offer a more complete view of human understanding.

Because mine was an effort of interpretation, the questions of judgment need still to be addressed. Are the epistemological principles referred here to Aquinas still relevant today? Would they make any sense in a modern Epistemology? I think a very fruitful line of investigation could be the study of the notion of alterity as a basic original condition of the object in human knowing. The notions of encounter, remedy, subjective original imperfection, etc., should be conjoined to a serious phenomenological analysis of human knowing. My emphasis on alterity is related to the view that the contribution of subjectivity is (essentially and *originally*) not related to the content, but to its mode of being. Our subjective storage of experience or personal history will certainly and greatly influence later perceptions, and this can be taken as a cognitive fact. But is this fact original? Is it not based precisely on more original facts? And what are the conditions of possibility of those original facts, and of the very development of experience? The work of Cornelio Fabro, deeply imbued in both the Phenomenology of Perception and the Metaphysics of Knowledge, can be a helpful tool for research in this direction.

Epilogue: Knowing after Kant

> We are meant to know; we are so by nature.
> The perfection of the known,
> however, is not expected as a friend we already know,
> but as the food we do not have.

We do need *food*, and this is the transcendental orientation of a potency to its particular object. This need, however, does not perfect itself in any way, but rather calls for the perfection of another. Food perfects the hungry stomach, but hunger will not transform a stone into bread.

The image of food, however, cannot be taken much further, because it is just an image, and knowing is different from that, more than that. The hungry stomach will actually transform the food into something belonging to the body. The knower, instead, will not eat his or her visitors, but will welcome them as they are. The known stays home as a visitor, always different, always interesting, always other.

For Aquinas, as I read him, there is meaning in the things themselves and he is, in this sense, different from Kant. If St. Thomas is right, there is a need to face again the more original questions of Epistemology, namely the problem of the universals and the very characterization of knowing. There is a need to get away from skeptical biases and unfruitful dialectics. The alternative to Kant is not a going back to the things themselves which leaves the subject, so to speak, staring speechless at a world of objects. An Epistemology sensitive to the psychological development of the human subject, the (Thomistic) fact of knowing in its metaphysical essence, and the conditions of possibility for both is, in my view, the way forward to a more helpful philosophical account of human knowing.

> Otherwise, by dissolving the meaning of things in our dealings with them,
> we risk losing also the meaning of our own existence.
> The existential void is the emptiness of a soul who did not welcome things as
> they are—with their own caprices and beauty—a soul who thus remained alone
> in the self-made prison of his or her own world of ideas and values.
> Then, when the door to the world is closed, the path to Heaven cannot be found.
> God is hidden behind the trees, behind the beauties He made.
> It is only by encountering others that we can hear about God.[639]
>
> It is good for neither man nor woman to be alone.
> Let humanity, then, be open to the adventure of knowing.

[639] A "philosophical translation" of this paragraph can be found in the *Appendix*, Note 21.

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Appendix: Other Authors, Excursus, Latin Texts and Translations

Note 1: Other Relevant Authors (Introduction)

According to ***John Haldane***,[640] St. Thomas uses the Aristotelian text to explain his (Aquinas') theory. Aristotle's concern is more metaphysical in that the agent intellect explains, for him, the intellectual faculty's passage from potency to act. Aquinas' concern is more gnoseological in that Aquinas is trying to explain the fact that we know by means of universal concepts. In other words, for Haldane, St. Thomas is making sense of the problem of the universals, whereas Aristotle is concerned with the fact that we know after not having known.

Again, according to Haldane, the way St. Thomas uses the Aristotelian agent intellect to fit his purposes is by making it a formal a priori. In the Avicennian Platonism, the universal forms would seem to come from a certain illumination from above. But Aquinas reacts against this Epistemology:

> [Aquinas] maintains that the actuality of the *agent intellect* consists in the universal *content* of its acts, and it is this which confers generality upon the thoughts (*species expressa)* of the *passive* mind. Without the work of the former no concepts would be available; and without these cognition could not take place, for the sensuous presentation of the environment could not be ordered.[641]

Haldane's suggestion is that, for Aquinas, the agent intellect is active regarding the universality as content and, in this way, Aquinas subscribes to a theory of a formal a priori. For Haldane, the Thomistic alternative to Platonism (forms coming from above) is the forms coming from inside, because they cannot come from experience.

Finally, I would like to suggest that the epistemological and metaphysical concerns, as Haldane conceives them, need not be seen as opposing each other in Aristotle and Aquinas. Rather, it is in order to explain both the fact of the universal actuality of the content and the

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[640] Cf. John Haldane, "Aquinas and the Active Intellect," *Philosophy* (UK) 67 (1992): 199-210.
[641] 205.

possible intellect's *consequent* passage from potency to act that the agent intellect is called to the scene. In other words, the possible intellect would not pass from potency to act if there were not an intelligible in act, and the nature of the sensible thing would not be intelligible in act if there were not an agent intellect. The point of departure is that we know those natures after not having known them.

Wayne Hankey's[642] point is to establish the continuity between natural and supernatural knowledge by means of a doctrine of the agent intellect as a formal a priori. Because the agent intellect is already a certain participation in the content of the divine light (implicit knowledge of the transcendental notions), it is not so difficult to understand how grace can elevate this potency to a knowing of God that is explicit. This would also be the reason for a more "positive" knowledge of God by faith (as opposed to an emphasis on the *via negativa*).

In his understanding of the agent intellect in Aquinas as a formal a priori, i.e., as providing intelligible content to sense experience, Hankey refers extensively to Smit,[643] with whom he agrees,[644] and confirms his own interpretation with some of St. Thomas' texts which are discussed in the body of the thesis.

R.E. Houser,[645] in his study on the metaphor of light among the Greeks, ascribes to the agent intellect in St. Thomas not just its distinction from the possible intellect but its separation from the subject. In his understanding of Aquinas, Houser seems also to confound the light of the agent intellect with the light of grace.[646] Finally, Houser suggests that the efficient causality of the agent intellect is not a formal cause and does not add content, because light must be transparent.[647] However, Houser does not indicate in what

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[642] Cf. Wayne J. Hankey, "Participatio Divini Luminis, Aquinas' Doctrine of the Agent Intellect: Our Capacity for Contemplation," *Dionysius* 22 (2004): 149-178.

[643] Cf. 163, 162 and *passim.*

[644] Cf. 173.

[645] Cf. R. E. Houser, "Philosophical Development through Metaphor: Light among the Greeks," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 64 (1990): 75-85.

[646] Cf. 83-85.

[647] Cf. 81.

way, then, light produces intelligibility in things that are only potentially intelligible and cannot exist as universal, unchanging and necessary.[648] In other words, despite the fact that he would arguably reject the consideration of the agent intellect as a formal a priori, Houser does not distinguish between intelligibility as content and as mode of being.

Note 2: On Cory's Interpretation (Footnote 205)

This seems to be Cory's interpretation. Abstraction for Aquinas would be "the object's [read: "the phantasm's"] causing its intelligible likeness in the intellect by the power of the agent intellect";[649] "Quasi formed by this immaterializing power, images are intelligible merely in the sense that they can *perform the proper act* of actually intelligible entities, without *being* intelligible entities."[650] For her, the agent object is the sensible image under the influence of the agent intellect, not though as instrumental but as secondary cause; she proposes that the relationship between agent intellect and phantasm is similar to the relationship between universal and particular cause. Basically, for Cory, the agent intellect causes the intelligible mode of being *of the phantasm*, not an intelligible species different from it, nor the intelligible mode of being of an intelligible content (the latter, as I propose).

Note 3: The Mediation of the Phantasm (Footnote 238)

It is not possible to treat thoroughly the mediation of the phantasm in intellectual knowing, but certain principles may orient the reader to understand my position. What I propose is, basically, that the *content* of the phantasm is out there, but not in the same mode of being as it is in the phantasm. Related to this, I propose also that the phantasm is for intelligence the particular itself, insofar as its content is real (we do not know the phantasm, but the thing itself through its phantasm). I acknowledge the fact that the phantasm is composed of elements from memory and imagination; this fact, however, gives the phantasm more objectivity, and not less, because this "subjective" composition represents what is out there

[648] 83-84.
[649] Cory, *Averroes*, 40.
[650] *Ibid.* 51, cf. 23, 47.

more accurately than a representation of only the present features of a particular thing. The subjective activity of composition is natural, and here applies the principle that nature does not fail in what is proper. That this subjective activity, though natural, is not arbitrary but based on the data of experience themselves, as well as many other problems connected with perception, cannot be treated here, but cf. Fabro, *Percezione e Pensiero*. That which is most important, in my view, is to distinguish the content of the phantasm from the mode of being in which this real content is present in the faculty. In *this cognitive mode of being* the content is not out there, but what is known is the content itself, and abstraction happens with regard to the content.

Note 4: The Stability in Material Things (Footnote 248)

Cf. *In Boet. De Trin*. 5, 2, ob. 6 et ad 6:

> Not every object of natural philosophy is subject to movement […] The soul and the other natural forms, even if they do not move in themselves, they do move with regards to something else, and besides this, they are perfections of mobile things: it is in this sense that they fall under the consideration of natural philosophy.[651]

That the forms are moved per accidens imply that they are in what is moved (cf. corpus).

Democritus had also denied stability to material things:

> He took intellect to be, not the faculty for knowing truth and understanding intelligible objects, but a mere sense-faculty. Only the sensible, he thought, could be known, since only the sensible existed. And because the latter is continually changing there could be no [determinate] truth about anything.[652]

See in the same context: "Aristotle, however, proceeded along another way. For first he showed in many ways that there is something stable in sensible things."[653]

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[651] *In Boet. De Trin*. 5, 2, ob. 6 et ad 6: "Non omnia, de quibus est physica, sunt in motu […] anima et aliae formae naturales, quamvis non moveantur per se, moventur tamen per accidens, et insuper sunt perfectiones rerum mobilium, et secundum hoc cadunt in consideratione naturalis."

[652] *In I De Anima* 3, 198-205: "[Ipse] non utebatur intellectu qui est circa veritatem, idest virtute intellectiva qua anima intelligit intelligibilia, sed solum vi sensitiva, et quod nichil cognosceretur nisi sensibile, cum nichil poneret in rerum natura nisi sensibile; unde cum sensibilia sint in continuo motu et fluxu, opinatus est nullam veritatem determinatam esse in rebus."

[653] *De Spirit. Creat.*, a.10, ad 8: "Aristoteles autem per aliam viam processit. Primo enim, multipliciter ostendit in sensibilibus esse aliquid stabile." Cf. *In Met*. 11, lect. 6, 2232.

Note 5: The Reason for Calling the Species or Form *ratio* (Footnote 267)

The reason for calling the species or form *ratio*[654] can be taken from the following text:

> And form, which is also termed the intelligible structure because the intelligible structure of the species is derived from it, is called substance […] inasmuch as it is something actual, and […] inasmuch as it is separable from matter in thought but not in reality […] And although the composite is separable in an absolute sense, yet some of the other things which are called substances are separable in thought and some are not. For a form is separable in thought because it can be understood without understanding individuating sensible matter; but matter cannot be understood without understanding form, since it is apprehended only inasmuch as it is in potentiality to form.[655]

Note 6: The Error of the Natural Philosophers (Footnote 293)

In 84, 2 c., the same error is attributed to the Natural Philosophers. See also:

> Like, they said, must be known by like. If then the soul is to know all things it must contain a likeness of all things according to their natural mode of being. They could not distinguish between the mode of existence that a thing has in the mind or the eye or the imagination from that which it has in itself.[656]

> "They expressed this by saying that the reason why the soul knew all things was that all things entered into its composition, and that the soul possessed the likeness of all things according to the mode of existence, i.e. a corporeal one, which things have in themselves outside it."[657]

Note 7: Text of *Q.D. De Anima*, a.3, ad 8 (Footnote 298)

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[654] Cf. also *In Met*. 12, lect. 10, 2595.

[655] *In Met.* 8, lect. 1, 1687: "Forma vero, quae et ratio nominatur, quia ex ipsa sumitur ratio speciei, dicitur substantia quasi ens aliquid actu, et quasi ens separabile secundum rationem a materia, licet non secundum rem […] Et licet compositum sit separabile simpliciter, tamen secundum rationem, aliorum quae dicuntur substantiae, quaedam sunt separabilia, et quaedam non. Forma enim est separabilis ratione, quia potest intelligi sine materia sensibili individuante; materia vero non potest intelligi sine intellectu formae, cum non apprehendatur nisi ut ens in potentia ad formam."

[656] *In I De Anima* 4, 19-36: "Dicebant enim quod oportebat simile simili cognosci; unde si anima cognoscat omnia, oportet, quod habeat similitudinem omnium in se secundum esse naturale, sicut ipsi ponebant. Nescierunt enim distinguere illum modum, quo res est in intellectu, seu in oculo, vel imaginatione, et quo res est in seipsa."

[657] *In I De Anima* 12, 10-15: "Dicebant animam, ad hoc quod omnia cognosceret, esse compositam ex omnibus; et quod similitudo rerum omnium esset in anima secundum proprium modum essendi, scilicet corporalem."

According to the Platonists the reason why something is understood as a one-in-many [i.e., universally], is not to be attributed to the intellect, but to the thing. They argue that, because our intellect knows a thing as a one-in-many, it would apparently be empty of any real content unless there were one real (thing) shared by many individuals. For in that case the intellect would have in itself nothing corresponding to (…) reality. Hence the Platonists felt obliged to posit Ideas, by participation in which both natural things are given their specific nature, and our intellects made cognizant of universals. But according to Aristotle, the fact that the intellect understands a one-in-many in abstraction from individuating principles, is to be attributed to the intellect itself. And though nothing abstract exists in reality, the intellect is not void of any real content, nor is it misrepresentative of things as they are; because, of those things which necessarily exist together, one can be truly understood or named without another being understood or named. But it cannot be truly understood or said of things existing together, that one exists without the other. Thus whatever exists in an individual which pertains to the nature of its species, and in respect of which it is like other things, can be known and spoken of truly without taking into consideration its individuating principles, which distinguish it from all other individuals [of the same species].[658] (Parenthesis mine, square brackets translator's. Latin follows here)

Secundum Platonicos causa huius quod intelligitur unum in multis, non est ex parte intellectus, sed ex parte rei. Cum enim intellectus noster intelligat aliquid unum in multis; nisi aliqua res esset una participata a multis, videretur quod intellectus esset vanus, non habens aliquid respondens sibi in re. Unde coacti sunt ponere ideas, per quarum participationem et res naturales speciem sortiuntur, et intellectus nostri fiunt universalia intelligentes. Sed secundum sententiam Aristotelis hoc est ab intellectu, *scilicet quod intelligat unum in multis per abstractionem a principiis individuantibus. Nec tamen intellectus est vanus aut falsus, licet non sit aliquid abstractum in rerum natura. Quia eorum quae sunt simul, unum potest vere intelligi aut nominari, absque hoc quod intelligatur vel nominetur alterum;* licet non possit vere intelligi vel dici, quod eorum quae sunt simul, unum sit sine altero. Sic igitur vere potest considerari et dici *id quod est in aliquo individuo, de natura speciei, in quo simile est cum aliis, absque eo quod considerentur in eo principia individuantia,* secundum quae distinguitur ab omnibus aliis.

Note 8: Text of *Q.D. De Anima*, a.2, ad 5 (Footnote 324)

The human soul is an individuated form and so also is its power which is called the possible intellect, as well as the intelligible forms which are received in the possible intellect. But this does not prevent these forms from being actually (understood), for a thing is actually (understood) because it is immaterial, not because it is universal.

[658] *Q.D. De Anima*, a.3, ad 8.

> Indeed, the universal is intelligible because it is abstracted from material individuating conditions.[659]

Note 9: The Figure of "Food" (Footnote 348)

An image somewhat similar to that of "remedy" is the figure of "food":

> We ought, therefore, to reach conclusions about objects before activities for the same reason as leads us to define activities before potencies. The 'objects' in question are [like food to the vegetative faculty, both the sensible object with respect to the sense, and the intelligible object with respect to the intellect.][660]

Clear also is the similarity between sense and intellect in that regard.[661] The reference to food in the text above, however, could also be interpreted as simply a comparison between the relationships of each object (food, the sensible and the intelligible) to its correspondent faculty.

Note 10: The Same Interpretation of the Aristotelian Identity in other Texts (Footnote 375)

The same interpretation can be seen clearly in other texts and works of Aquinas, for example in *CG II*, 98, par. 14-19; *Ibid.,* 99, par. 5-7, especially:

> But since the intellect in perfect act is the thing understood in act, someone may think that a separate substance does not understand material things; for it would seem incongruous that a material thing should be the perfection of a separate substance. Rightly considered, however, it is according to its likeness present in the intellect that the thing understood is the perfection of the one who understands it; for it is not the stone existing outside the soul that is a perfection of our possible intellect. Now, the likeness of the material thing is in the intellect of a separate

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[659] *Q.D. De Anima*, a.2, ad 5: "Anima humana est quaedam forma individuata; et similiter potentia eius quae dicitur intellectus possibilis, et formae intelligibiles in eo receptae. Sed hoc non prohibet eas esse intellectas in actu: ex hoc enim aliquid est intellectum in actu quod est immateriale, non autem ex hoc quod est universale; sed magis *universale* habet quod sit *intelligibile* per hoc quod est abstractum a principiis materialibus individuantibus."

[660] *In II De Anima* 6, 156-161: "Unde et prius oportebit determinare de obiectis quam de actibus, propter eamdem causam, propter quam et de actibus prius determinatur quam de potentiis. Obiecta autem sunt sicut alimentum respectu vegetativi, et sensibile respectu sensus, et intelligibile respectu intellectus."

[661] Cf. *Chapter 3*, section 5.

> substance immaterially, according to the latter's mode, not according to that of a material substance. Hence, there is no incongruity in saying that this likeness is a perfection of the separate substance's intellect, as its proper form.[662] (Latin follows here).
>
> Cum autem intellectus in actu perfecto sit intellectum in actu, potest alicui videri quod substantia separata non intelligat res materiales: inconveniens enim videtur quod res materialis sit perfectio substantiae separatae. Sed si recte consideretur, *res intellecta est perfectio intelligentis secundum suam similitudinem quam habet in intellectu*: non enim lapis qui est extra animam, est perfectio intellectus possibilis nostri. Similitudo autem rei materialis in intellectu substantiae separatae est immaterialiter, secundum modum substantiae separatae, *non secundum modum substantiae materialis*. Unde non est inconveniens si haec similitudo dicatur esse perfectio intellectus substantiae separatae, sicut propria forma eius.

Cf. also *In III De anima* 7, 37-48:

> He says that if the soul is indeed all things, it must be either simply identical with all things or a formal likeness of all things. The former view was that of Empedocles who made out that we, being earth, know earth, and being water we know water, and so on. But obviously the soul is not simply identical with the things it knows; for not stone itself, but its formal likeness exists in the soul. And this enables us to see how intellect in act is what it understands (in act); the form of the object is the form of the mind in act.[663]

Finally, cf. *Summa* I, 14, 2.

Note 11: Other Studied Texts in Support of our Interpretation of the Aristotelian Identity, from *In Metaphysicorum* (Footnote 381)

In *In Met.* 12, lect. 11, 2617, the objection to the doctrine that God knows his own intelligence is a wrong transposition of what happens in human understanding to the divine: to know the other seems to be first, and to know oneself is derivative. Therefore, if the object of God's understanding were God himself, his knowing would not be the utmost.

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[662] *CG II*, 99, par. 6-7.

[663] *In III De anima* 7, 37-48: "Et dicit, quod si anima est omnia, necesse est quod sit, *vel* ipsae res scibiles et sensibiles, sicut Empedocles posuit quod terra terram cognoscimus, et aqua aquam, et sic de aliis; *aut* sit species ipsorum. Non autem anima est ipsa res, sicut illi posuerunt, quia lapis non est in anima, sed species lapidis. Et per hunc modum dicitur intellectus in actu esse ipsum intellectum in actu, inquantum species intellecti est species intellectus in actu."

The answer is simply that *in the separate substances* the intellect in act and what is understood are not different, and therefore in God they are the same.[664] What is relevant for our purposes is that the Aristotelian identity, which for Aquinas applies to every intellect, implies identity with the object in itself *in some cases*, but is always an identity with the object *in its intelligible mode of being*.[665]

The following text can help us to see that, in understanding, there is identity in one sense and alterity in another sense. "In the case of the speculative sciences it is evident that the concept, which defines the thing itself, is the thing understood and the science or knowledge of that thing. For an intellect has knowledge by reason of the fact that it possesses the concept of a thing."[666] This is what we have called the alternative expression of the Aristotelian identity: the intellect is one with the thing in its abstracted mode of being (the act of the intellect is the *rationem rei*, not the thing itself in its natural being). The text continues:

> Therefore, since in the case of all those things which do not have matter the intellect when actually understanding does not differ from the thing understood, then in the case of the first substance, which is separate from matter in the highest degree, the act of understanding and the thing understood are evidently the same in the highest degree. Hence there is just one act of understanding pertaining to the thing

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[664] Cf. *In Met.* 12, lect. 11, 2620.

[665] Cf. *Q.D. De Anima*, a.5, ad 1: "For after Aristotle had determined the role of the possible and agent intellect, he had to determine the role of the intellect-in-act. He first distinguishes it in relation to the possible intellect, because the possible intellect and the thing known are not one and the same. However, the intellect or science-in-act is the same as the thing actually known. Aristotle had said the same thing about sense, namely, that sense and what is potentially sensible differ from each other, but that sense and what is actually sensed are one and the same." [Nam postquam Aristoteles determinavit de intellectu possibili et agente, necessarium fuit ut determinaret de intellectu in actu, cuius primo differentiam ostendit ad intellectum possibilem. Nam intellectus possibilis et res quae intelligitur, non sunt idem; *sed intellectus sive scientia in actu est idem rei scitae in actu*, sicut et de sensu idem dixerat, quod sensus et sensibile in potentia differunt, sed sensus et sensibile in actu sunt unum et idem.]; *De Spirit. Creat.*, a.10, ad 3: "The intellect in potency is not the thing that is understood in potency, but the intellect in act, or knowledge in act, is the thing that is understood or known in act." [… intellectus in potentia non est intellectum in potentia; sed intellectus in actu, sive scientia in actu, est res intellecta vel scita in actu.]

[666] *In Met*. 12, lect. 11, 2620: "In speculativis vero scientiis manifestum est, quod ipsa ratio definitiva rei est res scita, et est ipsa scientia sive intelligentia. Per hoc enim est sciens intellectus, per quod habet rationem rei."

> understood; that is, the act of understanding the thing understood is not distinct from that of understanding the act of understanding.[667]

The clarification "*in his quaecumque materiam non habent*" comes because the objection points out the original alterity of the object in *human* understanding. St. Thomas does not challenge the objection in that sense, but clarifies that it does not apply to the divine. The text at least suggests that there can be alterity regarding the object, although there is always identity in a different sense.

Note 12: The Distinction between Species and Object (Footnote 383)

Other texts show this distinction between species and object:[668]

> Averroes' second argument fails because it does not distinguish between that by which one understands and that which is understood. The species received into the possible intellect is not that which is understood; for, since all arts and sciences have to do with things understood, it would follow that all sciences are about species existing in the possible intellect. And this is patently false.[669]

> But in order that there be one thing understood, there must be a likeness of one and the same thing; and this is possible if the intelligible species are numerically distinct. For there is no reason why there should not be several different images of one thing; it is thus that one man is seen by several.[670]

> Consequently we must understand that, although the intelligible species received in the possible intellect are individuated inasmuch as they exist in the possible intellect, still the universal, which is conceived by abstraction from individuating

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[667] *In Met*. 12, lect. 11, 2620: "Cum igitur intellectus in actu et intellectum non sit alterum, *in his quaecumque materiam non habent*, manifestum est quod in substantia prima, quae maxime remota est a materia, maxime idem est intelligere et intellectum. Et sic una est intelligentia intellecti tantum, et non est aliud intelligentia intellecti, et aliud intelligentia intelligentiae."

[668] Cf. for example *De Ver* 2, 3, ad 2 (difference in divine knowing between what he knows and the means by which he knows), ad 3 and ad 10.

[669] *CG II*, 75, par. 7: "Secunda vero ratio ipsius *deficit, ex hoc quod non distinguit inter id quo intelligitur*, et id quod intelligitur. Species enim recepta in intellectu possibili non habet se ut quod intelligitur. Cum enim de his quae intelliguntur sint omnes artes et scientiae, sequeretur quod omnes scientiae essent de speciebus existentibus in intellectu possibili. Quod patet esse falsum."

[670] *CG II*, 75, par. 9: "Sed oportet, ad hoc quod sit unum intellectum, quod sit unius et eiusdem similitudo. Et hoc est possibile si species intelligibiles sint numero diversae: nihil enim prohibet *unius rei* fieri *plures imagines* differentes; et ex hoc contingit quod unus homo a pluribus videtur."

> principles, is known in these species inasmuch as they are immaterial. For universals with which the sciences are concerned, are what are known (through intelligible species) and not the intelligible species themselves.[671] (Translator's parentheses)
>
> The intelligible species through which the intellect understands formally, is present in the possible intellect of this and of that particular man, and for this reason it follows that there are many possible intellects. Nevertheless the quiddity (quod) known through such a species is one, if we consider this quiddity in relation to the thing known; because the universal which is understood by both of these men is the same in all the things (of which it is the universal representation).[672] (Translator's parentheses)
>
> We must say that the thing which is understood is not related to the possible intellect as an intelligible species whereby the possible intellect is actuated, but that species is as a formal principle whereby the intellect understands […] And hence the species which makes seeing possible is not as a thing which is seen, but as that whereby the object is seen. And the same is true of the possible intellect […] Accordingly, a thing that is understood by two intellects is in a way one and the same thing, and in a way it is many things: because on the part of the object which is known it is one and the same thing; but on the part of the knowledge itself it is two different things.[673]

Note 13: The "Double Being" of the Species (Footnote 389)

This "double being" of the species, i.e., its real being as subjective modification and its "representative" being, can be seen in other texts:

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[671] *Q.D. De Anima*, a.2, ad 5: "Quamvis species receptae in intellectu possibili sint individuatae ex illa parte qua inhaerent intellectui possibili; tamen in eis, in quantum sunt immateriales, cognoscitur universale quod concipitur per abstractionem a principiis individuantibus. *Universalia enim, de quibus sunt scientiae, sunt quae cognoscuntur per species intelligibiles, non ipsae species intelligibiles*."

[672] *Q.D. De Anima*, a.3, ad 7: "Licet species intelligibilis qua intellectus formaliter intelligit, sit in intellectu possibili istius et illius hominis, ex quo intellectus possibiles sunt plures; id tamen quod intelligitur per huiusmodi species est unum, si consideremus habito respectu ad rem intellectam; quia universale quod intelligitur ab utroque, est idem in omnibus."

[673] *De Spirit. Creat*., a.9, ad 6: "Oportet dicere quod res intellecta non se habet ad intellectum possibilem ut species intelligibilis, qua intellectus possibilis sit actu; sed illa species se habet ut principium formale quo intellectus intelligit […] Unde species visibilis non se habet ut quod videtur, sed ut quo videtur. Et simile est de intellectu possibili […] Res igitur intellecta a duobus intellectibus est quodammodo una et eadem, et quodammodo multae: quia ex parte rei quae cognoscitur est una et eadem, ex parte vero ipsius cognitionis est alia et alia." Cf. *De Spirit. Creat*., a.10, ad 12.

There are two ways of considering the mutual likeness between two things. First, we can consider them inasmuch as they agree in a common nature. Such a likeness between the knower and the known is not required; indeed, we sometimes see that the smaller the likeness, the sharper the cognition. For example, there is less resemblance between the intellectual likeness of a stone and the stone than there is between the sense likeness and the stone, for the intellectual likeness is farther removed from matter; yet the intellect knows more profoundly than sense. Secondly, the likeness between two things can be considered from the point of view of representation. Such a likeness of the knower to the thing known is necessary.[674] (Latin follows here)

Similitudo aliquorum duorum ad invicem potest dupliciter attendi. Uno modo *secundum convenientiam in natura*; et talis similitudo non requiritur inter cognoscens et cognitum; immo videmus quandoque quod, quanto talis similitudo est minor, tanto cognitio est perspicacior; sicut minor est similitudo similitudinis quae est in intellectu ad lapidem, quam illius quae est in sensu, cum sit magis a materia remota; et tamen intellectus perspicacius cognoscit quam sensus. Alio modo *quantum ad repraesentationem*; et haec similitudo requiritur cognoscentis ad cognitum.

Therefore, these notions thus abstracted can be considered in two ways. The first one is to consider them in themselves. In this way, they are considered without movement and designated matter: this is found in the aforementioned notions only with regard to the being that they have in the intellect. The other way is to consider them with regard to the things of which they are notions, things that certainly subsist in matter and movement. And in this way these notions are principles of knowledge of those things, because every thing is known by means of its form. Thus, by means of these notions, immobile and considered without particular matter, we have knowledge (in natural science) of mobile and material things which exist outside the soul.[675]

[674] *De Ver* 2, 3, ad 9.

[675] *In Boet. De Trin*. 5, 2, c.: "Possunt ergo huiusmodi rationes sic abstractae considerari dupliciter. *Uno modo secundum se*, et sic considerantur sine motu et materia signata, et hoc non invenitur in eis nisi secundum esse quod habent in intellectu. *Alio modo secundum quod comparantur ad res*, quarum sunt rationes; quae quidem res sunt in materia et motu. Et sic sunt principia cognoscendi illa, quia omnis res cognoscitur per suam formam. Et ita *per* huiusmodi rationes immobiles et sine materia particulari consideratas *habetur cognitio* in scientia naturali *de* rebus mobilibus et materialibus extra animam exsistentibus."

"However, it might be said that inasmuch as intelligible forms inhere in the soul they are individuated; but as the likenesses of things they are universals representing things according to their common nature and not according to their individuating principles." [676]

Note 14: Intentional Identity without *quodammodo* (Footnote 407)

For an interesting text in which St. Thomas speaks about this intentional identity without *quodammodo*, see the following:

> And the mind in act is its object; for precisely [as] the object is or is not material, [in the same way it is] perceived by the mind. And just because Plato overlooked this process of abstraction he was forced to conceive of mathematical objects and specific natures as existing in separation from matter; whereas Aristotle was able to explain that process by the agent intellect.[677]

The italics of the Leonine edition indicate the terms of Aristotle that Aquinas quotes. The context makes clear that this is not an explanation of the "Aristotelian identity," but of the objectivity of knowing, insofar as *what* we conceive corresponds to the things themselves. Lambert says: "Human abstracted concepts are identical in content to things in the real physical order and in that respect are never more than the equal of things; their superiority lies exclusively in their function as 're-presentation' of those things in an immaterial mode."[678]

Note 15: Apprehension in 83, 4, c. (Footnote 420)

In 83, 4, c., the original apprehensive quality of the intellect is opposed to the tensive (as "tending towards") aspect of the will. We quote only the beginning of the corpus:

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[676] *Q.D. De Anima*, a.2, ob.7: "Sed dicebat quod formae intelligibiles ex illa parte qua inhaerent animae, sunt individuatae; sed ex illa parte qua sunt rerum similitudines, sunt universales, repraesentantes res secundum naturam communem, et non secundum principia individuantia."

[677] *In III De Anima* 6, 297-305: "Et *omnino intellectus* in actu *est res* intellectae, quia sicut res in sui ratione habent materiam vel non habent, sic ab intellectu percipiuntur. Et quia hunc modum abstractionis Plato non consideravit, coactus fuit ponere mathematica et species separatas, loco cuius ad praedictam abstractionem faciendam Aristoteles posuit intellectum agentem."

[678] Lambert, 98.

> The appetitive powers must be proportionate to the apprehensive powers, as we have said above. Now, as on the part of the intellectual apprehension we have intellect and reason, so on the part of the intellectual appetite we have will, and free-will which is nothing else but the power of choice. And this is clear from their relations to their respective objects and acts. For the act of 'understanding' implies the simple acceptation of something; whence we say that we understand first principles, which are known of themselves without any comparison. But to 'reason,' properly speaking, is to come from one thing to the knowledge of another: wherefore, properly speaking, we reason about conclusions, which are known from the principles.[679]

Note how "*potentias appetitivas*" are distinguished from "*potentiis apprehensivis*," and the description of *intelligere* (here the first operation of the intelligence) is described as "*simplicem acceptionem alicuius rei*." Significantly, even the movement of *ratio* from the principles to the conclusions is ascribed to the "intellectual apprehension": "*ex parte apprehensionis intellectivae se habent intellectus et ratio*."

Note 16: Understanding as an Activity (Footnote 449)

There is a tendency of every potency to its proper object, a sort of "transcendental orientation," to which Aquinas refers as "natural appetite." This is no more than the metaphysical tendency that, as every form, the faculties of the soul have to their own perfections. It is comparable to the tendency of every being to be what it is, and it is not enough to make these faculties "active" or "tendential" potencies. For Aquinas the appetitive potencies are necessary in the human soul[680] and are not to be confounded with the natural appetite:

> Each power of the soul is a form or nature, and has a natural inclination to something. Wherefore each power desires by the natural appetite that object which

[679] 83, 4, c.: "Respondeo dicendum quod potentias appetitivas oportet esse proportionatas potentiis apprehensivis, ut supra dictum est. Sicut autem ex parte apprehensionis intellectivae se habent intellectus et ratio, ita ex parte appetitus intellectivi se habent voluntas et liberum arbitrium, quod nihil aliud est quam vis electiva. Et hoc patet ex habitudine obiectorum et actuum. Nam intelligere importat simplicem acceptionem alicuius rei, unde intelligi dicuntur proprie principia, quae sine collatione per seipsa cognoscuntur. Ratiocinari autem proprie est devenire ex uno in cognitionem alterius, unde proprie de conclusionibus ratiocinamur, quae ex principiis innotescunt."

[680] Cf. 80, 1.

> is suitable to itself. Above which natural appetite is the animal appetite, which follows the apprehension, and by which something is desired not as suitable to this or that power, such as sight for seeing, or sound for hearing; but simply as suitable to the animal.[681]

Note 17: Knowing as Receptive (Footnote 454)

Aquinas has characterized knowing (and particularly understanding) as receptive in other works as well: "Our possible intellect can understand nothing before it is brought into act by a […] form [intelligible in act.]"[682]; "… [T]he intellect is passive to the intelligible…"[683]; "Our possible intellect is merely in potency in the realm of the intelligible; it is actualised through an idea drawn from sensible images."[684] (my trans.); the species "is impressed"[685] on the possible intellect. Knowing is "apprehensive"[686], "receptive"[687]; "perceptive"[688]; "*accipere*."[689]

Note 18: The Comparison between Intellect and Senses (Footnote 477)

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[681] 80, 1 ad 3: "Dicendum quod unaquaeque potentia animae est quaedam forma seu natura, et habet naturalem inclinationem in aliquid. Unde unaquaeque appetit obiectum sibi conveniens naturali appetitu. Supra quem est appetitus animalis consequens apprehensionem, quo appetitur aliquid non ea ratione qua est conveniens ad actum huius vel illius potentiae, utpote visio ad videndum et auditio ad audiendum; sed quia est conveniens simpliciter animali."

[682] Cf. *De Ver* 8, 6 in Lambert, 83: *"*Intellectus possibilis noster nihil potest intelligere antequam perficiatur forma intelligibili in actu."

[683] *CG II*, 76, par. 15: "… [I]ntellectus patitur ab intelligibili…"

[684] *In II De Anima* 6, 173-190: *"*Intellectus noster possibilis est in potentia tantum in ordine intelligibilium: fit autem actu per formam a phantasmatibus abstractam."

[685] *De Spirit. Creat*., a.10, ad 17. Cf. *In Met*. 9, lect.8, 1864-1865.

[686] Cf. *In Boet. De Trin.* 6, 2, c..

[687] Cf. *In I Sent* d.3, q.4, a.5, c.; *In III De Anima* 1, 131-139; *De Spirit. Creat*., a.9, c.; *Q.D. De Anima*, a.4, ad 8: "The activity of the possible intellect consists in receiving intelligibles, whereas that of the agent intellect consists in abstracting them." [Actus intellectus possibilis est recipere intelligibilia; actio autem intellectus agentis est abstrahere intelligibilia.] and ad 9; a.5, c.; a.13, c..

[688] Cf. *In III De Anima* 4, 100-104: "Moreover, just as the potential intellect's function of receiving intelligible objects is attributed to the individual man as its subject, so also is the work of the agent intellect, the abstracting of such objects from matter." [Videmus etiam, quod sicut operatio intellectus possibilis, quae est percipere intelligibile, attribuitur homini, ita et operatio intellectus agentis, quae est abstrahere intelligibilia.]; *Q.D. De Anima*, a.2, ad 15.

[689] Cf. *Q.D. De Anima*, a.2, ad 15; *De Ver* 8, 10 ad 3 in Lambert, 98; *Q.D. De Anima*, a.4, c..

The comparison between intellect and senses can be seen in other works of Aquinas. In *In Boet. De Trin.* 6, 2, c., for example, both imply an apprehensive moment. In the *Contra Gentiles*:

> Consequently, in the act of understanding, the intelligible species received into the possible intellect functions as the thing by which one understands, and not as that which is understood, even as the species of color in the eye is not that which is seen, but that by which we see. And that which is understood is the very intelligible essence of things existing outside the soul, just as things outside the soul are seen by corporeal sight.[690]

In *In III De Anima* 1, 56 ff., both are passive and receptive, precisely in the context of the distinction of the faculties; *In III De Anima* 2, 264-279 is similar to the text quoted of *Contra Gentiles*; in *In III De Anima* 10, 20-27 both imply a certain "apparition" and knowing in the absence of the things known, for which some of the names proper to each faculty may sometimes be used interchangeably; in *In III De Anima* 5, 233-238 intellect and sight are not deceived in their proper objects, *quod quid est* and colour. "For it is evident that the act of intellection has its origin in the possible intellect as the first principle whereby we understand, just as the operation of sensing has its origin in a sentient power."[691] Note how in this last text the act of understanding is characterized as a certain "coming out," and so allegedly as active, but only in the same way that the act of the senses could be characterized as active. St. Thomas is simply talking about the spontaneity of knowing, in the sense that "we know": knowing is an act of the subject. In *In Met*. 11, lect. 7, 2253 both are operations that remain in the agent. "Now as the sense is directly informed by the likeness of its proper object, so is the intellect by the likeness of the essence of a thing. Hence the intellect is not deceived about the essence of a thing, as neither the sense about

[690] *CG II*, 75, par. 7: "Habet se igitur species intelligibilis recepta in intellectu possibili in intelligendo sicut id quo intelligitur, non sicut id quod intelligitur: sicut et species coloris in oculo non est id quod videtur, sed id quo videmus. Id vero quod intelligitur, est ipsa ratio rerum existentium extra animam: sicut et res extra animam existentes visu corporali videntur."

[691] *Q.D. De Anima*, a.3, c.: "Manifestum est enim quod haec operatio, quae est intelligere, egreditur ab intellectu possibili sicut a primo principio, per quod intelligimus; sicut haec operatio sentire egreditur a potentia sensitiva."

its proper object."[692] Stump compares them in the role of the species ("Like sensible species and phantasms, the intelligible species are immaterial forms that are means of cognition and similitudes of things outside the mind")[693] and on page 263 she provides other texts of Aquinas in which the similarities between intellect and sense can be seen.

Note 19: The distinction between agent intellect and possible intellect (Footnote 495)

The distinction between agent intellect and possible intellect is present in other works of Aquinas. "Neither do I say that these two potencies, namely the agent intellect and the possible intellect, are actually one and the same potency differently named according to different operations; in fact, whenever different actions are reduced to contrary principles, it is impossible to reduce those actions to the same potency."[694] (my trans.) "Now, the possible intellect is compared to the agent intellect as its proper patient or recipient, because the agent intellect is related to it as art to its matter."[695]

Note, in this last text, that the possible intellect "receives" the agent intellect as active cause, not as its own act or form: otherwise the comparison would be not with the **art**, but with the **form of the artefact**. This is what St. Thomas interpreted in the Aristotelian text. "For the agent intellect stands in the same relation to the intelligible species received into the possible intellect as art to the artificial forms which it produces in matter, as the

[692] *Summa* I, 17, 3 (in Stump, 233 note 90): "Sicut autem sensus informatur directe similitudine propriorum sensibilium, ita intellectus informatur similitudine quidditatis rei. Unde circa quod quid est intellectus non decipitur: sicut neque sensus circa sensibilia propria."

[693] Stump, 262.

[694] *In II Sent* d.17, q.2, a.1, c.: "Nec iterum dico, haec duo, scilicet intellectum agentem et possibilem, esse unam potentiam diversimode nominatam secundum diversas operationes; quia quaecumque actiones reducuntur in contraria principia, impossibile est eas reducere in eamdem potentiam."

[695] *CG II*, 76, par. 2: "Intellectus autem possibilis comparatur ad agentem ut proprium passivum sive susceptivum ipsius: habet enim se ad eum agens sicut ars ad materiam, ut dicitur in III De Anima."

example used by Aristotle in *De anima III* […] makes clear."[696] Cory quotes an interesting text of Averroes from his *Long Commentary to De Anima*, where the Commentator prospects the limits of the analogy of art, pointing out that the agent intellect is not the absolute origin of the content, because in that case the phantasms would not be required.[697]

More Aquinas' texts for the distinction could be quoted.[698] Sellés[699] states that for Aquinas the action of the agent intellect precedes the reception of the possible intellect, quoting *CG II*, 77, n. 3. Stump speaks of a distinction of parts in the intellect: "Aquinas thinks of the intellect as divided into an active part and a passive part. The active part, generally called 'the agent intellect', abstracts the intelligible species from the phantasms and deposits them in the passive part of the intellect, which is generally called 'the potential intellect' or 'the possible intellect.'"[700]

Note 20: On the two Opinions as to the Effect of Light (Footnote 619)

"There are two opinions as to the effect of light…"[701]

> Hence, following [Aristotle's] opinion, I say that light is necessary for seeing, not because of colour, in that it actualises colours (which some say are in only potency so long as they are in darkness), but because of the transparent medium which light renders actual, as the text states.[702]

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[696] *CG II*, 76, par. 18: "Comparatur enim intellectus agens ad species intelligibiles receptas in intellectu possibili, sicut ars ad formas artificiales quae per artem ponuntur in materia: ut patet ex exemplo Aristotelis in *III De Anima* [cap. V, 1; 430 a]."

[697] Cf. Averroes, *LCDA,* III, 18 in Cory, *Averroes*, 25.

[698] Cf. *CG II*, 76, par. 15; *Q.D. De Anima*, a.4, ad 8 et ad 9; a.5, c.: "Therefore there must exist within us a formal principle through which we receive intelligible species, and one whereby we abstract them. These principles are called the possible and the agent intellect respectively." [Oportet igitur esse in nobis aliquod principium formale quo recipiamus intelligibilia, et aliud quo abstrahamus ea. Et huiusmodi principia nominantur intellectus possibilis et agens.]; *In III De Anima* 4, 1-7; 100-104; *De Spirit. Creat*., a.10, c..

[699] Cf. Sellés, *EIA*, 251.

[700] Cf. Stump, 264.

[701] 79, 3 ad 2.

[702] *In II De Anima* 14, 356 ff.: "Unde secundum sententiam Aristotelis dicendum est, quod lumen necessarium est ad videndum, non ex parte coloris eo quod faciat colores esse actu, quos

In *In III De Anima* 4, 43-53 the light does not make in act as the agent intellect makes in act. Cf. also the following:

> For this reason others offer a different and more acceptable explanation, namely, that light is necessary for sight inasmuch as it perfects the medium […] Consequently the comparison between light and the agent intellect does not hold in all respects, because the agent intellect is necessary for this reason, that it may make the potentially intelligible to be actually intelligible. Aristotle pointed this out in the De anima, (Book III) when he said that the agent intellect is like light in some respects.[703]

Note 21: "Philosophical Translation" of the Second Last Paragraph of the *Epilogue*

> Otherwise, by dissolving the meaning of things in our dealings with them, we risk losing also the meaning of our own existence. The existential void is the emptiness of a soul who did not welcome things as they are—with their own caprices and beauty—a soul who thus remained alone in the self-made prison of his or her own world of ideas and values. Then, when the door to the world is closed, the path to Heaven cannot be found. God is hidden behind the trees, behind the beauties He made. It is only by encountering others that we can hear about God.

This "philosophical translation" does not intend to convey the same meaning as the previous images, but does intend to help in the understanding of some of the principles on which those images depend. An image may sometimes convey more than one idea, and can sometimes help in the understanding of deeper ideas than can mere philosophical expression. The use of images serves also as a scholarly device, insofar as it can help the reader to form the right phantasm in order to understand. At the same time, the limitation of an image may come from the impossibility of its adapting perfectly to the meaning it tries to convey, and/or from a lack of art in the one who creates the image.

At the beginning of this paragraph, I imply that a Kantian formal a priori tends to "*dissolve the meaning of things in our dealings with them*," insofar as the meaning passes from being

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quidam, tantum dicunt esse in potentia, cum sunt in tenebris; sed ex parte diaphani, inquantum facit ipsum esse in actu, ut in litera dicitur."

[703] *Q.D. De Anima*, a.4, ad 4: "Et ideo alii aliter dicunt, et melius, quod lumen necessarium est ad videndum in quantum perficit diaphanum […] Comparatio ergo luminis ad intellectum agentem non est quantum ad omnia; cum intellectus agens ad hoc sit necessarius ut faciat intelligibilia in potentia esse intelligibilia actu. Et hoc significavit Aristoteles in *III De Anima*, cum dixit, quod intellectus agens est quasi lumen quoquo modo."

something in the things themselves (Thomistic prospective) to being something bestowed on things by the subject's activity (Kantian prospective).

By "*existential void*" I mean the lack of meaning in human existence, insofar as the subject finds no reason, no purpose, no answer in life and, thus, faces despair. The subject realizes that, if everything depends on him or her, then everything participates the subject's contingency, imperfection and finitude, and thus falls into nothing. There is no hope of perfection (= happiness), because the one who acknowledges one's own need and desire for perfection, finds oneself as being the perfection of everything else.

This existential void is produced, in my view, by the attitude of rejecting things as having a meaning in themselves ("*not welcoming things as they are*"). It is similar to what happens when one, instead of listening to the other person, is always trying to hear only what one wants to hear. When the subject does not accept the limit that a thing brings with itself, when the subject does not welcome something as "other," but tries to see his or her own utility in that thing, the subject remains alone, having things to deal with but nothing to receive.

The attitude of "humility" or "welcoming," instead, is that which opens the door to a meaningful world. But once this door is open, the limits of things and their being-there-before-us inspires the search for a cause. Participated being is by necessity a caused being. A meaningful, independent world presents itself as a mystery, as a big question. This is why it is said that "*when the door to the world is closed, the path to Heaven cannot be found*." "Heaven" can here be understood as ultimate meaning, happiness or God Himself. When the door to the world is open, we may find the path towards God, because the human way to arrive at the knowledge of God is ascending towards Him by means of the knowledge of creatures.

That is why I say "*God is hidden behind the trees*." The image "behind the trees" can mean several things. First of all, God is not "within" the trees but "behind" them, insofar as God is not "part" of creation, nor does God belong to creation as its intimate energy or form; God

is, rather, to be considered "beyond" creation. The distinction between God and creatures, however, is not spatial ("*here* is the world and *there* is God"); God is everywhere. Instead, the distinction between God and creatures is metaphysical. God is actual fullness of perfection, a pure act including intensively and simply (without differentiation) all of the perfection of being, whereas each creature is limited, possessing a specific perfection and a limited corresponding act of being. God is everywhere, therefore, insofar as God causes each gram of being in the universe. In this way, "behind the trees" points to the distinction between God and creatures, the essential "otherness" of God.[704]

"Behind the trees" is also a figure of a kind of play between God and human beings. The purpose of God in creation is to be found by human beings who rejoice in finding God as those who win a game. Human beings are supposed to look for God. God is hidden because God wants human beings to look for Him, not because God does not want to be found. God wants to be found, and God wants to be found in such a way that those who find Him may be happy with their own "cleverness." God, however, can be found only by those who get out of themselves, and recognize their needs. In a sense, it is only by accepting the limitation imposed on us by the things themselves ("welcoming things as they are"), and by accepting our own limitation and need ("going out to play the game"), that we open ourselves to the unlimited happiness of finding God.

"*It is only by encountering others that we can hear about God*." This last line means what has already been said regarding the necessity of ascending to God by means of creatures. The reason I say "hear" is because by means of creatures we cannot "see" God, but we can certainly "hear" God in His created effects; the effects make us realize that there is a cause, in the same way as the sound of the bell makes us realize that someone is at the door.

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[704] This position is different from considering God an a priori of human understanding, for two reasons: first, because we find God not by reflecting on ourselves and our mode of knowing, but by reflecting on the limits of creatures; and second, because we cannot know ourselves before knowing creatures in themselves. We do not deny that the knowledge of ourselves be crucial or even needed in order to know God.

This line can also mean that only by encountering those who preach the Gospel can we hear about God, insofar as "No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known."[705] That is, the natural knowledge of God is obtained by encountering creatures and reasoning from them; the supernatural knowledge of God is obtained by encountering the divine messengers and welcoming their message.

Note 22: The Complete Text of Fabro in *NMP* 272-273

> Certainly God, who is the 'ipsum intelligere subsistens', is the intelligible sun of the spirits and the first cause of every truth; but, as in the sensible realm it is not necessary that the eye sees its objects turning directly to the sun, but it is enough that they be seen insofar as they are rendered evident by the light derived from the sun – likewise, in the created intelligible realm, it is enough, and even fitting, that the creature sees its objects insofar as they are rendered evident by a light participated from the divine sun.[706] This light is for man the agent intellect, which Aristotle has said to be in noi [Greek] '*like the light*'[707] and which St. Thomas describes always as the highest participation and the inmost seal (in the natural order) of the divinity in us. The agent intellect is principle productive [*fattivo*] of the intelligible and this intelligible that[708] comes to us not by direct participation from God, but through a complex process of abstraction accomplished by the participated light, the agent intellect, in the realm of the concrete and diffuse participations of the sensible world: 'The intelligible species which are participated by our intellect are reduced, as to their first cause, to a first principle which is by its essence intelligible—namely, God. But they proceed from that principle by means of the sensible forms and material things, from which we gather knowledge, as Dionysius says.'"[709]

Note 23: Text of *In III De Anima* 1, 170-180 (Footnote 520)

> The early philosophers' principle [was] that intellect must be compounded of all things if it can know all things. But if it knew all things, as containing them all in itself already, it would be an ever-actual intellect, and never merely in potency. In the

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[705] *John* 1:18.

[706] *De Veritate*, q. XVIII, a. 1.

[707] *De Anima*, Gamma, 5, 430, a. 15.

[708] This word should probably be omitted in the original.

[709] Fabro, Cornelio, *La Nozione Metafisica di Partecipazione secondo San Tommaso d'Aquino*, in *Cornelio Fabro: Opere Complete*, vol. 3 (Segni: EDIVI, 2005), 272-273. The text which Fabro quotes from Aquinas is 84, 4 ad 1: "Species intelligibiles quas participat noster intellectus, reducuntur, sicut in primam causam, in aliquod principium per suam essentiam intelligibile, scilicet in Deum. Sed ab illo principio procedunt mediantibus formis rerum sensibilium et materialium a quibus scientiam colligimus, ut Dionysius dicit." (Latin text used by Fabro)

> same way he has remarked already of the senses, that if they were intrinsically made up of the objects they perceive, their perceptions would not presuppose any exterior sensible objects.[710]

Note 24: The Intellect as "*tabula rasa*" in Other Works (Footnote 521)

"The intellect is in potency to all intelligible forms having none actually, just as prime matter is in potency to all sensible forms having none actually."[711] The objection is not challenged in that regard. See also the following:

> It would follow that the possible intellect would not receive any species that are abstracted from our phantasms, if one intellect belongs to all those who are and who have been. Because, now that many men who knew many things have already gone before us, it would follow that with respect to all those things which they knew the possible intellect would be in act and not in potency to receive them, because nothing receives what it already has.[712]

[710] *In III De Anima* 1, 170-180: "Dicebant [antiqui] enim eum [i.e. intellectus animae] ad hoc quod cognosceret omnia, esse compositum ex omnibus. Si autem esset cognoscitivus omnium quia haberet in se omnia, esset semper intellectus in actu et nunquam in potentia: sicut supra dixit de sensu, quod si esset compositus ex sensibilibus, non indigeret sensibilibus exterioribus ad sentiendum."

[711] *Q.D. De Anima*, a.2, ob. 17: "Intellectus est in potentia ad omnes formas intelligibiles, nullam earum habens in actu; sicut materia prima est in potentia ad omnes formas sensibiles, et *nullam earum habet in actu.*"

[712] *De Spirit. Creat*., a.9, c.: "Sequeretur quod intellectus possibilis non reciperet aliquas species a phantasmatibus nostris abstractas, si sit unus intellectus possibilis omnium qui sunt et qui fuerunt. Quia iam cum multi homines praecesserint multa intelligentes, sequeretur quod respectu omnium illorum quae illi sciverunt, sit in actu et non sit in potentia ad recipiendum; quia *nihil recipit quod iam habet*."